JACK O' PETERLOO

THEODORA WILSON WILSON

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Jack o' Peterloo

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COUSINS IN CAMP.
THE ISLANDERS.
FIVE OF THEM.
NETHERDALE FOR EVER!
UNCLE TOM'S SCRAPE.

Jack o' Peterloo

A Novel in Three Episodes

THEODORA WILSON WILSON

MCMXXIV

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EPISODE I

1793

JACK O' PETERLOO

I

MUSIC, DEATH, DEBT

THE old world had managed to reel along into the year of our Lord 1793. Men and women still eat and drank, made love and money, and so long as the money-makers and the love-makers could secure a reasonable patch of dry land for themselves, they were happy to ignore such local floods as might roar in America, Ireland, or even red-running France.

So it happened that a very select company of enthusiasts for chamber-music and minuet-dancing were assembled at Sir Peter Mason's town residence one eventful January night, when the icy slush of the fog-bound streets attacked the vitals of the less fortunate.

Sir Peter was young, and on the marriage market. His aunt, Mrs. Fothergill, played hostess, and his sister Mary, a shy *débutante*, had chosen a secluded corner, in order to watch and listen and play with her own thoughts.

But the music was suddenly interrupted by the excited entrance of a French *émigré*.

"My lords and ladies! My royal master, his sacred majesty, King Louis, has suffered death at the hands of the Devil's devils!" and in the profound silence which occurred, he raised his hands and lifted his eyes towards the gold and white ceiling. "All righteous God! Avenge Thy sacred servant upon his murderers!" Then, crossing himself reverently, he sank back on a sofa to receive the eager condolences of his host and hostess.

The other guests broke into excited talk, for the execution of a king was worthy even of the interruption of a Corelli Quartette. Some of the company were awed and shocked, others were petulantly indignant, and some, seeing further than the rest, were afraid.

Mary clasped her hands together in her anguish at the vision of the frenzy of Paris and the bloodstained guillotine, and leaping up, she faced the company, her eyes burning with horror.

"But—the people! How they must have suffered before they brought themselves to such an act!"

Consternation swept over the elegant assembly, but Mrs. Fothergill gave a pleasant reassuring laugh.

"What a monstrous notion, Mary! The notion of a child!"

The young girl, overwhelmed with troubled shyness, hurried away to an alcove, wishing the polished floor would break under her sandalled feet.

But a young artist, David Ross, anxious to support the maid without adding to her embarrassment, drew the fire upon himself.

"They who goad a beast to fury can scarcely blame the beast when it turns!"

"Take care, Ross!" said Sir Peter, with a gay laugh. "We don't want to apply for *lettres-de-cachet* to commit our own revolutionary countrymen to the dungeon."

"And how long will it be before our own Habeas Corpus Act is suspended, so that Parliament may doom whom it will without trial?" he demanded readily.

But a new combatant appeared in the beautiful person of Lady Anne de Mandeville. She held her head high, and her eyes flashed as she tapped her foot impatiently.

"We shall be fools if this message from France does not warn us to keep a wise eye on our own seething rebels! And across the water—why not war, gentlemen, to teach this French rabble manners?"

An approving applause greeted the girl's sally, and Sir Peter rallied eagerly to her support.

"A pretty prophetic wit you have, my Lady Anne!" he said. "I wager we shall be at war with France within a week!"

"Then I pray, sir, that we now dance to the good success of our arms," she answered him archly.

Sir Peter readily gave the signal to the musicians, and David Ross, bowing gravely in response to the scornful glance which the lady threw at him, felt himself excused from the dancing, and at liberty to seek other diversion.

But Mary rose shyly at his approach.

"You must not invite me to dance, sir. I cannot. It is to me as though the winds of God were blowing, and this gay music is as the laughter of fiends over a tormented world."

"Nay, fair madam," he answered her, with a grave bow, "I can no longer dance. I came but to thank you for the bravery of your words."

Mary smiled as she held out her hand.

"My words were no bravery, sir. They broke from me before my timidity had time to recall them. I have the honour to wish you a good evening," and the young artist, taking the hand she offered, pressed his lips upon it, then drew aside a heavy curtain and allowed her to pass.

It was a little later that Sir Peter escorted Lady Anne to this same alcove, for there was no time to spare if he was to secure the lady from many another ambitious suitor.

"Yet how can I invite you, madam," he said, with his irresistible charm of manner, "to share a bankrupt's home, whose father's debts are his only inheritance? In spite of the brave show we make, I have already done some pretty skirmishing with the bailiffs, and I confess to having little stomach for the foul merriments of a debtor's prison!"

Lady Anne gave a gay laugh.

"One never believes the patient's own diagnosis of his complaint; yet in any case why dig your own grave, Sir Peter, before the passing bell has tolled? Wherefore not enclose?"

"Enclose Bracken Fell Common?" he exclaimed, startled.

"And why not?" she demanded. "My uncle has safely enclosed 6,000 acres, and Enclosure Bills flood the House as goose-down in autumn! As my uncle explained to me, a signature or two in a district will promote a petition, and as for the small commoners, it would be far too great a waste of shoe leather from Bracken Fell to Westminster for any of them to petition against you!"

Sir Peter looked at the young girl with amazed admiration. Here was a woman, not only beautiful, but with brain to help a man forward.

"'Tis a scheme worthy of your brilliance, Lady Anne, and——" He broke off and possessed himself of her hand. "If I have the good fortune to present you with a successful Enclosure Bill, will you do me the honour of sharing the acres with me?"

Lady Anne looked at him from under her heavy brows.

"Shall we wait, Sir Peter, until the Bill is secure in your hand?"

She smiled radiantly, to take away the edge of her keen words, and allowed him to kiss her hand as often as he would.

It was only when Sir Peter had reached his room, and dismissed his sleep-ridden servant, that a vision came to him.

Yet the vision was not of the Lady Anne, with her clear-cut beauty, her diamond eyes, her crisp modelled coiffure. Sir Peter was thinking of a woman with tumbled hair and deep child's eyes, and soft lips of which he knew the feel.

In vain he tried to overwhelm the vision with the darkness. Madge, with her gay laughter, her low sobbing. Madge, as he drove her off to the Scottish border. Madge—as he married her according to Scottish law. Madge—as he lied to her later, and deceived himself into regarding the marriage as no true one. Madge—as she broke away from him and strewed at his feet the guineas with which he would have comforted her.

He buried his face in the pillow. But the rumble of wheels, or was it some low sobbing, captured the sleep from his eyes, and he tossed restlessly until dawn.

"Damn!" he muttered. "She was proud as Lucifer, and will keep out of my way."

II

THE FEAR IN HER EYES

It was a mild day in February as John Wolfson came in from Bracken Fell Common with a dog at his heel and his evening's milking in his pail.

He was welcomed by his wife, who sat at the cottage door with a baby on her knee. Yet, as he set down his pail she shivered, and her eyes glowed with a strange haunted look.

"Madge, lass," he said tenderly, as he drew her into the cottage, "if only I could drive yon fear from thy eyes!" For answer she lifted her baby and buried her face in his wrinkled neck. "Thou art no longer feared for thy baby? He and his mother are mine!"

"Aye," and she sank her head. "It was thoo, John, who

made an honest woman of me when—— Tell me——" and she shivered again. "Where does God hide Himself when women are so befooled?"

"But Madge, lass, why worrit over yon old tale? Him that loved tha, and waited for tha, has taken tha as his own wedded wife, and——" he lifted the baby from her arms, "this little lad is my lad and thy lad, as none shall dare to deny. Jack Wolfson—a lad of the people—and no aristocrat—blessed be God!" He gave the baby back to her, and one tiny hand clung still to his hard work-worn fingers. He loosened it gently, and then went over to the heavy loom which almost filled the kitchen. But a sharp knock made the highly-strung Madge leap to her feet. Wolfson opened the door, but gave no invitation for entrance, and the visitor, finding the great bulk of the weaver placed aggressively in the doorway, frowned, and his voice hardened.

"John Wolfson," he began bluntly, "you are a skilled craftsman, and this is the third and last time I offer you good work and fair pay as an overseer at the mill.

"You have said right, Mr. Adam Strong," returned the weaver coolly, "the third and last time."

"Which means you refuse?"

"Aye, sir—I refuse!" He turned abruptly and closed the door in the mill-owner's face.

"Oh, John!" Madge clung to him terrified.

"Let me be, lass," he said, with a passion which Madge was learning to respect. "Would you have your own husband turn slave-driver?" She stood aside. Wolfson went to his loom and began adjusting his work; but Madge, having laid her baby to rest, felt the air, now vibrating with the rumble of the loom, unendurable. She flung a shawl over her head, and went out into the evening.

It happened that she was standing by the broken wall of the old bridge which spanned the turbulent beck, when she was startled by the sound of galloping horses, and looking towards the rough road she saw that one of the riders was a woman in a gay habit and white-plumed hat. She was evidently in distress on a runaway, and the rider behind was worse than powerless, for his chase was only exasperating the lady's maddened mare.

The animal was making for the sharp angle of the bridge, and the heavy chances were that both mare and rider would be

flung over the broken parapet into the rock-bound stream below.

But was Madge, the weaver's wife, to risk life and limb on behalf of some fine lady visitor at the Manor House? Madge stood irresolute and held her breath as the mare plunged forward, and Lady Anne de Mandeville, losing all her remaining nerve as she saw the gleam of the water below, loosened her hands from the reins and uttered a scream of abject terror.

Then Madge made up her mind, and flinging her shawl over the mare's head, she seized the bridle and allowed herself to stagger and drag against the wild plunging. Lady Anne lost her seat and came to the ground just as Sir Peter, galloping up from behind, flung himself from his horse and kneeled at the lady's side, while Madge held on pluckily, soothing the terrified mare as best she might, as she stroked her neck and wiped off the perspiration with her shawl. It seemed natural that the mare should be of secondary importance to the lady, and Madge, noticing that there was no serious injury, watched as Sir Peter supported her in his arms and kissed away her terror. Madge waited her chance to fling away the mare's bridle and make her escape.

"My good girl!" said Sir Peter graciously, "you have done a great deed in saving this lady's life, and if you will but tell me where you live, you shall be suitably rewarded."

But the low voice, vibrating with scorn, made Sir Peter look more closely into the face of the speaker.

"Sir Peter Mason may rest assured that Madge Wolfson will never receive reward from him."

Sir Peter stepped back, as though struck in the face.

"And I will give five guineas to this brave woman," said Lady Anne patronisingly. But it seemed that she was to have no better luck than Sir Peter. Madge dropped a deep curtsey, and her cool voice rang out mockingly:

"I thank your ladyship! I was a fool to risk my life. I will not add to my folly by taking reward!" and throwing the mare's reins from her, she disappeared into the gathering gloom.

"Your northerners are independent, Sir Peter!" said the lady, with an uncomfortable laugh. But Sir Peter did not answer her. He was occupied in gathering up the reins that he might replace Lady Anne in the saddle.

III

SIR PETER MOVES

THE idea of increasing the manorial property by promoting an Enclosure Bill grew in Sir Peter's mind. He considered that Lady Anne had made a clever suggestion, and he lost no time in calling into his counsels Adam Strong, the mill owner, Parson Lutterby, the chief farmers in the district, and an attorney. They agreed to proceed without delay, and to take the first legal step of nailing up a notice of "intention to enclose" on the church door on the following Sunday.

But Sir Peter, full of eager confidence, found it difficult to satisfy his young sister, as he walked with her in the beautiful old garden.

"But brother, surely you have forgotten the cottagers and the squatters?" and she looked at him with her clear, honest eyes. "What will they do about their cows, their geese, their firewood and peat, their corn and hay and garden ground?"

"The country needs more food and better farming," he said dictatorially. "It is our national duty to stop all this terrible waste of good land. As for your cottagers, whom you so delight to spoil with your charity, you need have no fear. They will find work on the enlarged farms and in the new mills and the developing mines."

"But brother, forgive my ignorance, but have they not certain rights—these poor?" She held up her hand to stop a hasty interruption. "It would be dreadful for us to become robbers of the poor, as the Bible hath it."

"No need to worry your head concerning the Bible, little sister," he said lightly, "when Parson Lutterby himself has given his signature."

"That he may increase the value of his glebe?" she shot out.

"You are altogether too young to understand this business, child!" he said, not without affection. "And remember that a Bill passed by Parliament and signed by His Majesty, deserves not so blunt a name as robbery. As for the poor, they are, as the Bible hath it, 'ever with us,' a fit object for your sweet charity, the means for which I never make stint."

Mary took a few paces in advance. Her brow was clouded. Her whole mind was disturbed.

"Mr. David Ross says this enclosure of the common lands by private folk will, in the end, bring terrible woe on England."

Sir Peter gave a curious laugh, and took his sister's arm.

"I shall repent that I have given so generous a help to a certain young artist, if he is to fill your head, sweet sister, with such folly."

But the girl, to his amazement, flung herself from him.

"I cannot bear it!" she cried, looking at him challengingly. "Perhaps—who knows—God will not bear it—one day!"

It was well that a bell sounding from the house warned them of a coming meal.

Now David Ross had taken upon himself to instruct Mary in the mysteries of the globe, and it was little wonder that the witchery of the moonlight tempted him that evening to suggest that they should go out into the open and trace the eternal constellations which had guarded night for all time.

He was, in fact, pointing out to Mary the diamonds in Orion's belt, when they were both startled by hearing a wild song wail through the air, and by seeing a swinging light advance upon them.

Mary clutched David's arm. Then she loosened her hold and gave a light laugh.

"It is only poor Nancy Fodderty! She is accounted crazy by the folk of Bracken Fell." They stood together to listen to the high-pitched voice quavering out an old ditty:

> "God made the poor to toil and slave
> To dig themselves an early grave—
> God made the rich to skin the poor
> To clothe themselves for evermore—
> Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!"

The singer came stumbling through the brushwood, lifted her lantern and, seeing Mary, she instantly made a quick succession of curtsies. Then she looked eagerly into Ross's face.

"Young master, turn your eyes, that Nancy may learn the truth of you!"

Ross laughed, and humoured her good-naturedly, as she raised her lantern.

" Your eyes look deep and far, my lord ! "

" I am no lord, good woman ! I am but a poor artist who would see the world as God meant it to be ! "

" As God meant it to be ! " The woman gave a shriek of laughter, then clutched at Mary and waved her lantern round in a circle.

" What do you see, Nancy ? " asked the girl gently.

" I see the corn-stack flaming—three hundred years ago ! I see the Lady of Bracken Fell, as she rides round at a gallop, to win for the common people a boundary of common land, ere the stack dies in ashes. Seven miles she rides, and woe ! woe ! to them who shall steal from the people one yard of Bracken Fell Common ! "

Again her wild song rent the night, and they watched her light until it was engulfed in the darkness.

" Nancy tells the legend of the Lady of Bracken Fell. I had well-nigh forgotten it," said Mary, shivering. " We ought, sir, to be turning home."

But it seemed that the night had something more in store, for they paused at the sound of hoarse panting, a breaking through the bushes, and a low despairing moan.

Hurrying forward they came upon a woman who had flung herself down as though in uttermost exhaustion, and as Mary stooped, she looked into the terrified eyes of Madge, who, on recognising her, clung desperately to her skirt.

" Oh, Miss Mary, I can go no further ! "

" But whither would you go ? "

" In God's name, dear madam, keep truth with me ! I would go to the limestone quarry to warn them ! Oh merciful heaven, if they should be taken ? "

" But whom ? " and Mary lifted the woman to her feet and put a strong arm about her. Madge looked suspiciously at Ross, and Mary understood.

" You can trust this gentleman as you can trust me," said the girl quietly.

" Then, if your honour would but go to the limestone quarry ! " she said with a hurried vehemence. " You will find them—my husband and a dozen more poor craftsmen. 'Tis no sedition, your honour. On my bended knees I could swear that my husband prays every day for the good health of His Majesty. 'Tis but to talk of how poor men and women shall live—but the militia are out to-night—and—oh dear

madam, bid him do this deed of charity!" Madge sank back, and it was clear that her strength was exhausted.

"Let us go to the quarry, sir!" said Mary, with eager impetuosity. "Why should these luckless fellows be taken to some vile jail, from whence, God knows when they will issue forth again? I can show you the way."

But Ross hesitated, as well he might, at the thought of leading the young girl into danger.

"Nay, Miss Mary, let me first see you safely to the Manor House," he said.

"Too late—too late!" moaned Madge. "Oh good master and fair mistress, let them not be taken. For what magistrates hereabouts will listen to the plea of honest men who would but keep a roof over the heads of their wives and children?"

"This is no hour in which to think of ourselves, sir," pleaded Mary. "These honest folk may rot in some loathsome jail, or be thrown overboard from some fever-stricken ship, if we rescue them not. 'Tis surely a deed our pitiful Lord Christ would have us do?"

"As your honour craves for a home—a wife—a child——" and Madge clung to his knee.

"Come!" exclaimed Mary imperiously.

IV

AT THE QUARRY

It was not surprising that Adam Strong, the mill-owner, and others in the district keen on new industrial enterprises, should look with distrust on the dogged, obstinate young weaver, John Wolfson.

They needed the subservient labour of men, women and children on their own terms, and it was natural, therefore, to fear this man who knew no fear.

A commoner of Bracken Fell, bred of a race of craftsmen who had lived independent of squire and poor law, John Wolfson had also inherited a strong religious passion, which made him fearless where duty called, and Madge, knowing of secret midnight meetings held in their cottage, could not charm away forebodings of evil from her soul.

In the quarry, the men pressed close that they might catch

every word from their impassioned leader, as he talked of unity and the right to keep up the standard of life and independence which, with helpless despair the workers of 1793 saw slipping from them in this whirl of wild progress.

"For well-nigh fifty years, lads," said Wolfson, "they have been stealing away our right to some fixed wage and standard. Even the magistrates will no longer support us against these new masters, who would gather mine and mill and land and loom under their own control. If we protest, we are brought up for sedition and vagrancy, and our very judges are but these same masters. From end to end of the country the people petition in vain, and what wonder, when Parliament is packed with our oppressors? We have neither vote nor power—our only hope is to bind ourselves together——" and suddenly the speaker paused, noticing Ross's uplifted hand.

"Good sirs," said Ross in a low, keen voice, "begone, while yet you may."

With miraculous speed the audience melted away. Wolfson only remained to grip Ross's hand. "Whoever you are, sir, may the Master of men reward your honour for this night's warning."

He was gone, and Ross and Mary were standing alone in the quarry, when a dozen men broke in upon them, followed by some one on horseback, whom Mary instantly recognised as her brother.

As they threw up unveiled lanterns there were exclamations and curses in plenty.

"The vermin have run to earth after all," said an officer furiously.

But Peter had seen his sister and her companion, and plunging forward, he swung his riding whip aggressively.

"So!" he shouted, beside himself with vexation, "it is thus you take advantage of my hospitality."

"Brother!" exclaimed Mary.

"Stand back!" he cried, bringing his whip down across the face of the unresisting artist. "That's for a cur!"

Ross, who was but lightly built, fell, and before Mary could help him, she found herself seized and dragged up to Sir Peter's saddle.

"And come not near the Manor House again!" shouted Sir Peter, "for every door shall be barred against you, and every dog warned!" and gripping his sister, he rode off.

Mary made no resistance, for not only would it have been useless, but she needed all her nerve to keep from falling and to concentrate for future action. Her brother's domineering spirit was awakening within this shy girl a new consciousness. She did not yet recognise that her heart had begun to beat in human rhythm with something outside herself, but at least, she suddenly perceived that she was grown up. Her girlhood was shattered—she was out in real life at last.

So a little later, as she stood in the great hall with the blaze of candles illuminating her flushed cheeks, Mary felt stimulated by a new power and courage to face what might befall.

Mrs. Fothergill was ready enough to sympathise with the torrent of accusations which Sir Peter let loose against Ross, for she had been fuming with annoyance at her discovery that Mary was no longer in the library ; but now, when she learned that her niece had been found alone with the young artist in the quarry, her wrath reached a degree of bitterness which Mary always dreaded.

" Perhaps you will deign to explain, Mary ? " said her aunt, as Sir Peter came to a breathless conclusion.

" I have nothing to explain," said the girl, with a dignified respect.

" A gentlewoman has nothing to explain who is found at midnight in company with a man—like any maidservant ? "

Mary's cheek paled. She perceived that she could not explain without breaking trust with the harassed villagers. She must not save even her honour at the expense of the poor.

" I can say nothing, dear aunt, save that I am sorry I have given you anxiety, and to assure you that nothing in the conduct of Mr. Ross has been otherwise than that of a gentleman."

" Send her to her room, aunt ! " said Sir Peter stormily. " I would be no inquisitor, but by the devil I have learnt enough to see to it that David Ross never darkens these doors again."

" See you, madam," he said scornfully, as Mary could not suppress a cry, " the poison has already been injected, and we must look to it that no second dose finds entrance to my fair sister's tender heart ! "

" I have the same hot blood in my veins as you, Peter," exclaimed Mary proudly. " You have insulted a gentleman

who is my friend, and I would have you know that from this hour I am no child. I am a woman!"

"And you mean by that——" he demanded all amazed.

"What I mean—I mean——" She bowed to him, curtseyed to her aunt, went to her own room and locked the door.

It was only when she was alone that she discovered herself to be cold and damp and trembling, and with a low moan she sank down against the bed. She would certainly never have slept that night had she known that her lover, further bruised and maltreated by the gang of disappointed brutes, had lain under the stars until Nancy Fodderty came upon him in her wanderings and aided him to her poor cottage.

V

AT THE CHURCH DOOR

It was Sunday, and the party from the Manor House made a brave show as, dressed in the height of the fashion, they arrived by coach or on horseback to take part in "Divine service."

Adam Strong was there, so also was John Wolfson, but Madge never now came to church.

Nancy Fodderty was, as usual, seated on a gravestone, where she was accustomed to wait, wet or fine, to gather what charity she might; for Nancy was not only pitied, but feared, and it was lucky for her, doubtless, that the stake and torch and ducking stool had gone out of fashion.

It was after Parson Lutterby had excelled himself in a discourse concerning the duty of the poor to obey the parish officers, as ordained by God for the universal blessing of mankind, that a church warden, Adam Strong himself, brought out a paper which he unrolled in sight of the company which stood about gossiping in the churchyard, and fixed it to the notice board of the church.

The people drew closer, for the church door was ever a newsmonger.

"And pray what have you there, Mr. Strong?" inquired John Wolfson, with grave dignity.

"I wager you can read!" and the mill-owner looked him in the eyes.

John Wolfson came up, stood, read. Then, with swift movement, he wrenched the paper from the board and tore it to fragments. Then he remained standing, cool, self-possessed and completely sure of himself, as he awaited the onslaught.

It certainly came, for in his amazement the mill-owner let his tongue wildly loose, and the congregation, whether gentry, commoners or squatters, stood listening in deep curiosity.

The hand-loom weaver had dared the mill-owner, the lord of the manor and the parson. It was a mad deed, and even those who agreed most with Wolfson, stood back fearfully, for as the world wags, a hundred may grumble to one who dares to act.

" If your tongue can win bread for the poor, pray talk till doomsday ! " said Wolfson, as Strong paused breathless. " I tore yon paper down, and I will tear it down again, though you flay the flesh from my back ! Tell me," and he raised his rich voice, " are the poor to be swept off God's earth and no man raise his hand ? Mines, mills, land, cottages —are you to have them all ? Are prices to rise and wages to fall and the workers cry to heaven, while the rulers shout ' Sedition ! Fetch out the soldiers ' ? "

" And by heaven, that is what shall be shouted in Bracken Fell, you contumacious scoundrel ! " exclaimed Sir Peter, provoked by a taunting hint from Lady Anne. " And look you, fellow ! Yonder notice you have destroyed is legal—legalised by the High Court of Parliament ! "

" Parliament ! " and Wolfson's eyes flamed. " What does a parliament of thieves care for the people ? Legal ! " His voice was awe-strikingly solemn, " The only legal law is the law of God, and that law declares that the earth is His—for all His children."

" This fellow seems anxious to get himself to the whipping post or on an overseas trip," cried Lady Anne. The jest seemed to amuse the ladies and gentlemen standing round.

Wolfson took a step towards her, and, suddenly afraid, she gripped Sir Peter's arm.

" And where would your ladyship have been this sunny morning, if ' this fellow's ' wife had not saved you from the river bed ? "

" Come, my lady," said Sir Peter hurriedly, " 'Tis not seemly for your ladyship to bandy words with the lower

orders!" and he was about to draw her off towards the coach.

"Wait, my bonny lady!" called a quavering voice as Nancy Fodderty sprang forward. "Wait—all of you!" and she swung her arm in a wide circle. The people waited superstitiously, not daring to go and being anxious to hear.

"So, Sir Peter Mason!" she cried. "You have, then, forgotten the Lady of Bracken Fell, who thought more of the people three hundred years ago than does lord or lady or parson to-day! Touch the common—then the curse of the gold you win will fall on your house and will eat into your family—and Nancy's laugh will follow—follow—follow you to hell!" As she spoke, she was creeping forward with cat-like motions, until she was so close to the party that Mary put out a kindly hand and smiled at her deprecatingly.

"Why Nancy—good woman!"

"Ah, lady of the brown eyes and the tender mouth," and she gripped Mary's hand in hers, "there will nought follow you through life and beyond the gates of heaven, save the blessing of the people!" Nancy worked herself backwards, then leaping the tombstone upon which she had been sitting, she danced off, throwing up her arms to the sky and ringing out her "Ha! ha! ha!"

"The woman is mad," said Sir Peter, in a worried tone as he looked towards Parson Lutterby.

"Yes—the parish has borne with her long enough!" agreed the parson. "We must take action; it is not decent that good churchgoers should endure such language!"

Wolfson gave a great laugh.

"Is it only the mad then, parson, who are on the side of the people?" and turning, he strode away.

But Mary was aware that Nancy had crushed into her palm a slip of paper, and curiously excited she managed to bury it in her pocket.

It was difficult to her proud and newly awakened spirit to endure the torrent of abuse which broke forth at the Manor House over Wolfson's action.

Sir Peter, worried and disturbed, felt himself on slippery ice, as for ought he knew the whole village was aware of Madge's story. Curiously, his sanguine temperament led him to trust the very woman he had deceived, and he was beginning to believe his self-created doubt as to the validity

of the marriage. "Having unto truth by telling of it, he made such a sinner of his memory as to credit his own lie." After all, it was an everyday event for a gentleman to do honour to a pretty chambermaid. Even the Lady Anne would expect any man to sow his wild oats, so long as he took care where he sowed them. But of the baby, shedding light from his roguish eyes into the weaver's home, he knew nothing.

Still, all things considered, it would be convenient to clear this mischief-maker and his wife out of the district, and Sir Peter felt ready to congratulate Providence in having put so good a chance in his way.

Therefore he and his house-party talked hotly of the insubordination of the lower orders, of the dangers of the example of France, and the blessings of a strong magistracy, ready to uphold the law.

Mary listened, and though she held her peace, realising that she had no argument at her command, her intelligence was exercised, and her resolution grew to a proportion which would have amazed her brother, had he been able to pierce behind the girl's gentle eyes.

And while the Manor House was settling the countryside to its complete satisfaction, Wolfson found that his wife had already heard the story as told by excited neighbours.

"Thou art not angry with me, Madge, lass?" he asked wistfully. "I could do no other. It was as though the Lord laid a grip of me, to be His mouthpiece."

"Yon is a big claim to make, John!"

"He that oppresseth the poor, reproacheth his Maker!" said Wolfson resolutely. "Was I to see reproach set up on the very church door and not speak?"

Madge lifted her son and raised him towards the ceiling.

"My God!" she said in a low, resolute voice, "take my son. Take Jack o' the People! Make him strong in limb and quick in brain and fearless in heart, till right is done to the people and the will of God is done on earth instead of the will of the squire, the parson and the bleeders of the land. Amen!"

It was a strange dedication, and the child kicked and crowed, and lifted his tiny hands, beating the air, until they struck against his "father's" cheek. Wolfson lifted him from his wife's arms.

"Jack Wolfson! Lord God, hear her! Take the lad! Whatever his name, wherever he came from, he is Thine. Amen!"

VI

MARY ANSWERS THE CALL

NANCY FODDERTY lived by herself in a squatter's cottage. Her father had squatted on the common when he married, and according to custom, if a man could build a hut in the night, and smoke could rise from the chimney in the morning, he had established his right.

He could live as he chose, asking leave of no man, and share rights of wood for his fire, eating for his cow, his pig, his poultry. Without document or signature he felt secure by time-honoured custom.

It was on Sunday evening that Ross, still struggling against his weakness, sat by Nancy's peat fire. The windows were small and the light was dim, but he did not need light to think about Mary. For he now knew that his artist's career, without Mary as his continual inspiration, was a dream of emptiness, yet he was also very sure that he might as well cry for the moon as for Sir Peter Mason's leave to wed his sister.

Nancy was a good nurse, and she was just stooping to enter the low doorway, bringing in some new-laid eggs, when she uttered a sharp exclamation.

"Get into the back room, sir!"

Ross rose, looked at her excited countenance in surprise, but did as she bid him. Another moment, and Mary came up to the door.

"Why, Nancy!" she said breathlessly, "may I come in? I fancy I am being followed."

Nancy drew Mary into the hut and closed the door.

"Why, bonny mistress, you are safe enough with Nancy."

"I was coming over the gorse fell and—but one always fears when the sun sinks."

"Nay, when the sun sinks, then folk may wake to the light of what is to come!" retorted Nancy.

"You say strange things, Nancy," said Mary smiling, as she peered through the darkened room.

"But you are right, mistress, as to the footsteps, for it was the lad, Robbie Graham, who was tracking you. He will

have a poor tale to tell them that sent him spying," and returning to the door, she gave a call.

"Robbie Graham, come out and show your face for the honest lad you are!" and, to Mary's astonishment, a young stableman from the Manor House came sheepishly forward.

"Thoo did well to show thyself," said Nancy sternly, "or the next time thoo crossed a horse, thoo would have found the devil riding aside of tha!"

"Oh, Nancy!" exclaimed Mary reprovingly.

Mrs. Fothergill, warned by Sir Peter to watch Mary closely, had chosen her spy unfortunately. Robbie adored Miss Mary, and was as much in awe of Nancy as were other inhabitants of the district.

"Ah, Robbie!" said Mary recovering herself, "I am glad you were sent to see me safely on my walk. If you wait under yonder tree I shall be glad of your company home."

"Mrs. Fothergill is a great lady, Nancy," said Mary, as she drew towards the hearth. "She cannot abide my wild ways. Yet in truth, how can I help the wildness that stirs within me? But tell me—why did you bid me come? What is troubling you?"

"'Tis nought that is troubling Nancy," said the woman, as she threw two peats on the glow.

"Then it is those poor craftsmen?"

"Whether an artist be a craftsman, God alone knows," whispered Nancy.

"What can you mean?" and the girl flushed deeply.

"Come, sir! The night flies—why waste it?" and to Mary's amazement, David Ross, with head weirdly bandaged, advanced from the tiny bedroom.

"Mary!" and he held out his hand.

"Mr. Ross! Oh I have feared for you."

"Good Mistress Fodderty has been mother and nurse to me, and now she has brought you to my side; and yet, now that I see you—I repent that you are here."

"Repent?" exclaimed Mary.

"I have no right—and you are so young! And yet, how could I go without one word to explain why it is that I cannot ask you to marry me?"

Yet it was the love in his eyes, even as he tried to speak so coolly, that flamed her face and told her the truth. For Mary

had learned no subtle art of love-making and love-refusing. She loved David. He loved her. Why should they not acknowledge the truth?

"Kiss her, my bonny lad—kiss her, your honour!" said Nancy with eager impatience. "Let not a lady's blushes fade before you have caught them on your lips?"

"I may?" he breathed.

"Why—of course—if you will, David," she answered simply enough.

Thus, in Nancy's poor hut, these two plighted their troth, ignorant of where such troth might lead them, and afterwards, David, with his arm about her, led her to a rough oaken settle.

"That you and I should belong to one another," he mused, as though indeed the truth were too great for him.

"And why not?" she asked. "You would make the world beautiful for all—may I not share the task, David?"

"But one cannot live on beauty, dearest, and there is as yet but little coin in my pouch."

"But I have my fortune—you forget!" she said shyly.

"Your fortune will wait on your brother's consent, and that will be hard to win," he reminded her. But Mary gripped her hands antagonistically, for there was a pride in her that did not brook opposition.

"Mary," and he took her hand, "I have a hard thing to ask of you. Will you return home as my betrothed—and wait—until I can come for you and lead you in all honour to the altar?"

"But for how long?" she faltered.

"God knows," he said reverently, "but meanwhile there is serious work to be done. I have spoken to many in this cottage as I have been lying here, and it may be that you can act as sister to the people here while I see what can be done in London."

"You mean—about the enclosure?"

"Exactly. I am, truly, only a needy artist, but I have friends in the House of Commons who are alert against such wrongs. It is not only the poor, but the very consciences of good men who love justice more than gold, and truth more than privilege and pride of place, that are being outraged."

"But you would write? You would not desert me in my ignorance?"

"Nay, truly," and he kissed her tenderly. "But Mary, in every age small minorities have always existed, who must struggle and suffer, even to crucifixion at the hands of their own class, when the passion seizes them to advance the coming of the kingdom of God."

"But it seems too great a notion, David, that you and I should be deemed worthy to share in such a task."

David looked into the glowing fire without answering her, and she linked her hand with his.

"Mary," he said at last, "I look through the years that are coming, and see pain and conflict. I see wrong and evil, war and famine. I hear the cry of children and the moan of the prisoner, and I see you—by my side—and God with His face turned upon us!"

"And what do you see in the eyes of God, David?"

"I dare not look," he answered her.

When Mary went home, escorted by Robbie, she talked pleasantly about the birds and horses, and the wrestling matches on the green, and if the lad suspected anything more than the kindly visit to Nancy, he said nothing. For had he weighed Mrs. Fothergill and Miss Mary in the balance, he would have known blindfold which scale would go down.

VII

THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

The business concerning the enclosure went on apace. The tearing down of the notice had not helped the commoners, but had drawn to Sir Peter's side all those who hoped that by standing alongside the great in the county they would gain some ounces of greatness for themselves.

Indignation meetings were held, not only by the villagers, but by the more numerous miners of Bishop's End, for they also would lose valued rights, which would throw them more completely under the power of the mine-owners.

Wolfson was the acknowledged leader, and night after night, either at his cottage or openly on the green, the people calculated what they might lose, and what life would mean to them when the bit of hay and corn was gone, and they could no longer depend on the milk, the pig, the geese, the poultry and the fuel. What comfort was it to them to hear of scien-

tific farming, if such advantage was but to pour profit into the hands of the landowners and powerful farmers, and leave them at the mercy of indifferent employers, with the parish overseers standing in the shadow ready with the stocks, the house of correction or the poor house?

The opponents of enclosure reluctantly decided that their only hope lay in counter-petition to Parliament. Yet even if they could gather such a number of opposing signatures as would give weight to their claim, who could carry the petition to London, and who could find money for so great an enterprise? It was well known that every resource of privilege and legal knowledge would be behind the petitions for enclosure, and throughout the country it was being proved that the efforts of the general mass of small commoners to establish their claims were failing pitifully.

Wolfson was the only possible spokesman, but at the notion that he should undertake the journey to London he shook his head.

Then it was that Madge, emerging from the dimness, stood out amongst them with her baby in her arms.

"John," she said quietly, "shake not thy head so readily. 'Tis but two hundred miles to London, and a sturdy foot takes a good yard at a stride."

"Aye, lass," and he looked at her thoughtfully, "but in days like these what man may leave his wife unsheltered——"

"Put me not as a barrier between thee and duty," she interrupted. "When the land has gone and the poor are humbled to the dust, let Bracken Fell folk remember that John Wolfson put neither wife nor child nor his own body before his duty, when the hour came."

"It would indeed be well, John, if thoo could let Parliament folk get a sound of thy tongue!" ventured a young blacksmith, Harry Vipond. Earning a living by his forge, he also was seeing his independence sinking from under his feet.

And then it was that the babe set up a wailing cry, domineering over the agitated gathering, until Madge soothed him at her breast.

"'Tis Jack o' the People—wailing for his lost inheritance," said Wolfson grimly. "Well, lads——" and he thrust out a great foot, "so long as these soles hang to my feet they shall mark the road to London."

VIII

A HORSE FOR A RIDER

MARY had not yet broken the news to her brother that she was troth plight to David Ross. There was no hurry, and at present the talk was all of land and mines and the rebellious spirit of the common people, and the patriotism of those who would bring prosperity to the nation by winning land to their own families.

Yet Mary kept herself well in touch with her friends in Bracken Fell, and though David had now returned to London, she was still a regular visitor to Nancy.

It was on one of these visits, that on taking up a basket which she had emptied on the table, she noticed that Nancy was looking at her with a meaning intentness.

" If Mistress Mary could but set a good horse loose on the gorse fell by the rowan tree, he would return to the Manor House stables when his task was done."

Mary instantly realised that she was to provide a horse for some purpose which Nancy did not wish to explain ; but she also came to the conclusion that she would never make a good conspirator, for she was quite incapable of stealing a horse from her brother's stable.

" A horse with a good saddle and a willing pace ! " persisted Nancy. " Such as Mistress Mary might ride herself when in a hurry."

Mary's face broke to merriment at the woman's broad hint.

There was certainly no reason why she should not lend her own mount, and though no word of pledge was given, Nancy was satisfied.

Now on that afternoon Sir Peter was in high good humour, having beaten the parson at bowls, and he flung himself down on a bench under the yew tree, and gaily offered his tobacco pouch.

" Nay, I must leave you to chew your victory," chuckled Parson Lutterby. " I want a word with Adam Strong. This enclosure scheme must go through without scandal, and we are getting to know who are the ringleaders in spreading the poison." He gave a loud laugh, and swung his golden-headed cane vindictively as he hurried away.

A few moments later Sir Peter looked up to see his sister

in all the charm of her girlhood, standing up against the high green hedge, a very embodiment of spring. Mary felt her heart beating too quickly for comfort. Perhaps this was her chance to make one last appeal for the commoners. If she could but capture her courage.

" Peter ! " and she sat down beside him and laid a hand on his knee, " You have beaten the vicarage champion ! I know it by his bowed back and the whirling of his cane."

" Parson Lutterby was scarcely whirling his cane on my account," he said mockingly, " but, little sister, I see a question in your eyes. Do you need some new gown, or perhaps a lighter horse than Dobbin—a brute you have ridden with long patience."

" Neither a gown nor a horse, brother," she said shyly.

" You grow monstrous fair, Mary," he said thoughtfully. " It is time we went off to London to give our gay gallants a chance to win a north country bride."

" Don't, Peter, please," she said earnestly, " I want no gay gallants."

" Nonsense, child. No maid is honest who pretends she does not value the gallantries of a lover ! But I will not plague you," and he patted her hand affectionately, " except to give notice that we go off to London so soon as this Enclosure Bill is through——"

" But Peter, it must not go through," she broke out. " Why should we wrong the neighbourhood ? "

" We act for the good of the country," he said quickly. " Why can you not understand ? "

" In truth Peter, I understand that it is ourselves we are serving. The people are seeing a future of sorrow and want, and it hurts vastly to think that by their sorrow we establish our own gain."

" You talk too much to these common folk," he said irritably. " How can they understand what is for their real gain ? Industry is opening out in every direction, and, as Parson Lutterby puts it, we would turn Old England into a very garden of the Lord. These miners and weavers and spinners are without intelligence, and think forsooth that they can exist on a patch of badly cultivated ground, while the enterprise of mill-owner and mine-owner is to be baulked at their pleasure. Indeed—they are putting us to damned inconvenience ! "

"Inconvenience!" Mary repeated the word, drawing her brows together sternly. "What if the villagers fear the inconvenience of finding themselves flung from their homes, as has been done far and wide in other parts of the country?"

"And how do they hear such fables, except through mischief-makers who tramp the country to gain an idle living?"

"But I read—strange reports, and now—as I follow my charities I see that fear has come into the people's eyes. Some of them already spurn me, and——" she sprang up and spoke with a moving passion, "I would rather live on a crust and share the people's trust, than live on the riches of the world and know that while the people are bowing the knee, they are cursing me in their souls!"

"What scoundrels have dared to insult you, Mary? By the devil, we will find means to make them sit till they ache in the stocks."

"Oh, Peter," she pleaded, "why cannot you understand?"

"Then I will speak more plainly," he said, with a bitter laugh. "The hour has come when, unless we crush the lower orders, they will crush us."

"Bravely said," cried the merry voice of Lady Anne. She rushed across the green, looking excited and nervous. "You are disputing about these wretched people? Shame, Mary, that you should seek to rob me of my betrothal gift!"

Mary drew back. She was beginning to understand that it was Lady Anne who was in truth directing her brother's nature towards this new ambition after wealth and power.

"And look you," she cried, "I have just had a monstrous time with that woman who once held my bridle on the bridge. It frightens me to be so insulted."

"But what did she say?" exclaimed Sir Peter, gripped with a very real horror.

"If she had spoken I would not have feared. But she stood in the shadow and dropped me a curtsey as I passed. Wishing to allay her, I smiled, but there was no answer in her face, and as I fled, I felt as though any instant an arrow might fly and pierce me between the shoulders."

"How strangely fanciful you are, Anne!" said Mary. "Why should Madge Wolfson wish to let arrows fly? She would scarcely risk the halter with a baby at her breast."

"A baby?" So the words broke from Peter. He leaped up, making mock fury to hide his agitation.

"In heaven's name," he cried wrathfully, "may we not drop this tormenting subject of the lower orders? Must we never cease to consider them and their savagery?"

Mary was startled at the outbreak, but Lady Anne clapped her hands merrily.

"You are right, Sir Peter! And I warrant there is yet time for us to practise that Corelli music before guests disturb us."

She took hold of his arm and smiled into his eyes.

"When the music arrives there is no room for the lower orders," she said softly, "but only for you and for me!"

IX

THE GREAT FACT

"ROBBIE," said Mary, "I have a fancy this evening to see whether I have forgotten my old trick of cross riding. Saddle Dobbin with the old saddle and bring him along to the stepping stones, for I do not want my friends to mock at my awkwardness."

Robbie took the order, but his brow was thoughtful. Yet at the stepping stones Dobbin was waiting as the young rider appeared.

Like a boy she was, and springing lightly to the saddle, she galloped off.

"Miss Mary knew well enough that she had not forgotten her old trick," thought the young man; but his thought was kept loyally to himself.

By the old Rowan tree Mary tethered the horse, then, slipping on a skirt, she went off to Nancy's cottage as conventional a young lady as any might care to see.

Nancy was not alone, and Mary put out an eager hand to Wolfson.

"Here," she said, handing him a paper, "is Mr. Ross's address. He will give you every help, and here is a purse of gold in case of need."

"The Lord bless you, Mistress Mary! Let the people bless you!" and he sank on his knees and kissed her hand.

"We must ever pray for the Lord's blessing," she said sorrowfully, "but the devil is strangely powerful in men—and women."

"Get you gone," said Nancy anxiously, "it is ill work lingering when the devil keeps watch."

John Wolfson took his leave, for, indeed, he was already afraid that some trick might be played upon him to hinder his journey.

In those days anything might happen on the wild roads, and even a simple tramping weaver might get himself into trouble by being robbed or taken up for vagrancy.

Madge had learned with hope that Nancy had pledged her word to get him a horse, but Nancy's words were often wild, and, indeed, to steal a horse would but lead with short shrift to the gallows.

So while Mary was hurrying back to the Manor House and Wolfson was taking the saddle, Madge pressed her baby to her breast, and then laying him down, she took up her spinning, so that through the motion of her hands her heart might grow calm again.

Madge would have been amazed had any one hinted that she had done a great deed in urging her husband from her side, for the common good of men and women who could never offer him any repayment.

But no spinning could calm Madge. She must get out into the open—make sure that her husband had passed in safety to the London high road.

Wolfson rode hard, but not at first in the direction of London, in order that he might put any possible pursuers off the track. But with gold in his pouch and a good horse under him, he did not now anticipate any real difficulty in getting safely to his journey's end.

Yet it was awkward that as he was crossing a rough stretch of forest land, he broke right in front of Sir Peter and Lady Anne as they were riding towards the Manor House.

Wolfson turned at an angle and disappeared, but Sir Peter pulled up excitedly and called to his companion to stop.

"Wolfson, I dare swear!" he cried, "and on a stolen mount. Wait here until I bring the fellow to a stand."

"Oh, Sir Peter!" she pleaded, "I dare not be left alone. Send the whole militia after him—but—don't leave me!"

Sir Peter paused reluctantly. It was hard to allow the man to escape, yet to leave the terrified lady was unthinkable.

"Well——" and he gave a grim laugh, "We shall soon be

able to gag his mischief-making tongue. His madness has now made him safe for the gallows ! "

" It would be a rare sight to see him swing ! " mocked Lady Anne, and it was as well she did not see the face of a woman standing rigidly behind a beech.

" Aye ! " agreed Sir Peter. " John Wolfson shall never set foot in Bracken Fell again. Providence is on our side, my lady. Your betrothal gift is secured—and the world will wag faster and more gaily."

" A betrothal gift—cursed ! " said a voice.

" Who spoke ? " exclaimed Lady Anne breathlessly, as she stared into her lover's eyes.

" No one ! " he said quietly. " Come—let us ride on."

" Aye, ride on—ride on—and the devil's luck to you, fair lady ! " came the voice once more.

" It was that dreadful woman ! " and Lady Anne cut her horse, until she was nearly thrown from the saddle.

" Gently—there is nothing to fear ! " said Sir Peter, as he secured her bridle. " It is difficult to teach these poor folk that we wish them no ill, and are but working for the good of the country and the beating of the arms of France."

" Her good luck sounded like a curse," and Lady Anne shivered. " Why does she follow us ? "

" Her husband is ringleader in this opposition to the enclosure. It is natural for a woman to take her husband's part," he said evasively. He led off at a quicker pace, thankful that as yet Madge had not betrayed him.

But on arriving at the Manor House, Sir Peter was cheered by good news from Adam Strong.

The more important commoners were gathering strongly to their side, and news had come that over a dozen more enclosures had been sanctioned by Parliament.

" The tide is with us," said the mill-owner merrily, " and it is only fools who swim against the tide."

" Of course ! " admitted Sir Peter, " and we have a good bunch of members ready to support our petition."

" Aye, though it seems that fellow Wolfson has got a rare number of signatures and crosses, and is off to London. Much good he may do there ! What notice will any take of a man who can't speak his own mother-tongue so that a Londoner may understand ? "

" And what say you, Mr. Strong," broke in Lady Anne,

" to the news that this fellow has stolen a horse—Yes, Mary—your own horse, Dobbin ! " she added, as Mary entered the room. " He will pay a high price for his ride when the law claps him in irons ! "

" What folly ! " said Mary steadily. " John Wolfson stole no horse. I lent him Dobbin."

Sir Peter uttered an exclamation and stood rigid.

" And why not ? " demanded the young girl coolly. " It is the law that petitions may be sent against enclosure. Would we wish to win because the other side had no fair play ? "

" Why talk so foolishly, Mary ? " said her brother, restlessly, as Mr. Strong, thinking the conversation was becoming somewhat intimate, gave a grave bow and hurried away. " There is but one side—the good of the country ! How could you lend a horse from our stables——"

" Dobbin is mine, brother. I ride him or lend him as I will. We must have a poor case if we grudge a poor petitioner a safe journey to London ! "

" So you turn traitor to your family, eh Mary ? " suggested Lady Anne.

" At least I refuse to be traitor to my own soul," she said swiftly. " Oh—I hate these prosecutions and oppressions—if we have the right on our side we need fear no poor weaver—and if not—then—we fight against God Himself—and that shall be no light battle ! "

" And with this petitioner you doubtless sent some letter to a flaxen-haired Scottish artist ? " mocked Lady Anne.

Mary was aware that Peter was looking at her intently, and she felt suddenly grateful to Anne for giving her this chance of getting rid of her secret.

" Why yes," she said radiantly. " It was vastly convenient for me to send a letter to David Ross."

" Mary—you dared ? " exclaimed her brother.

" And why not, when one day we are to be wed ? "

" This is a fact which must be faced," he said angrily.

" The great fact of my life, Peter, which I have faced once and for ever ! " and with a low curtsey, Mary left the room.

But late that evening Mrs. Fothergill and Sir Peter talked earnestly over Mary's exasperating " fact." This girl, who ought by all society law to be modestly subservient to her elders, had struck for independence with a strong hand.

"The truth is, dear aunt," said Sir Peter wrathfully, "I have nourished a viper at my hearth, and instead of biting me, he has bitten my sister. I thought I had quenched his ardour with my riding whip for siding with rebellion, and I heard afterwards that he received a handsome belabouring before they left him. But now, it appears that he has managed to crawl to London, and my own sister is sending him a scoundrelly ambassador on her own horse and bearing what message, heaven only knows."

"I know not what to advise," admitted Mrs. Fothergill. "Mary is so unlike other maidens. Recall how she flared up over those French regicides. And, believe me, she has flared up scores of times over what she calls the "wrongs" of our villagers. It has ever been the custom of the ladies of the manor to offer charity to such good folks as keep within their proper station and degree; but these wily cottagers have so deceived Mary that they appear as angel martyrs in her eyes. As for that woman Nancy, with her insufferable laugh, it is your duty to see her put away in a mad-house, to trouble us no more."

"When the Bill is through Nancy's cottage will go, of course—her father was but a squatter—but look you, aunt, we must carry Mary off to London with us and crowd her life with such gaiety that she will forget this country habit of intercourse with the poor. I have good news to tell you. Lord Rawby of Rawby has consented to present the Bill in Parliament. Being our neighbour, he will look for our support when he promotes a Bill of his own. If we could bring Rawby to Mary's feet we might win for her a position worthy of her wit and beauty."

"Mary reads too much," said Mrs. Fothergill solemnly. "I found her in tears but yesterday, and I asked her why she should waste her emotion on lovers who never existed save in some foolish author's mind. She threw down the book and looked at me like some wounded fawn. 'Nay, aunt,' she said, 'Dr. Goldsmith's poetry is no foolish fancy. I weep over his *Deserted Village* because one day even round Bracken Fell—the woe may spread!'"

Peter was making an impatient movement, when they became aware that Mary was in the room.

"You are talking of me?" she said simply. "You are wondering how you can make me give up David Ross. Perhaps

you are searching for some lover who may entice my heart by his wealth, his lands and his coal. But, in truth, dear aunt, you and Peter do but waste your time and thought."

"Mary, sit down—do!" said Peter earnestly. He was struck afresh with the loveliness of the young girl as she uttered her challenge.

"I pray you excuse me!" she said resolutely. "I would have you aware that I will never break faith either with my lover or with the people!" and before they could answer her, she was gone.

"You see for yourself what Mary is," said Mrs. Fothergill despairingly.

"Aye, the poison has gone deep!" admitted Peter, and there was an angry light in his eyes.

X

THE STUDIO ON THE STRAND

DAVID ROSS's studio was but a poor place in an old house jutting upon the Strand. Yet he loved the view of the muddy banks, the river, the comradeship with the watermen, and in quiet hours he wandered about the Temple Church, admiring the wonder of its design, and thinking of crusaders and the long procession of strange causes for which men and women, down the ages, had cast away their lives.

Just now it seemed as though the world lagged for want of inspiration, for man's struggle concentrated on making trade, fighting the French abroad and the people at home. It was true that a few eager spirits discussed other matters, but they did it under the sense that the world was against them, and that there was little chance that they would win any mass of opinion to their ideals.

The French Revolution was turning the cause of the people into a cause of dread to the place-holders, the privileged and the borough-mongers, and David Ross was now setting his mind upon using his art as a means of lifting the tragedy of the people before the eyes of an indifferent world.

He was earnestly engaged on a work showing the breaking up of a home by the press gang, when his woman came to tell him that a traveller had arrived from the north.

"And speaking, sir, as no man can speak and be understood in civilised parts."

Ross threw down his brush. His thoughts flew to Mary as he peered through the diamond-paned lattice. Then he hurried downstairs to the door.

"I am from Bracken Fell, sir," began the man, but Ross interrupted him by wringing his hand.

"Right welcome, Wolfson," he cried, "and if you can bed on a floor and sup on a poor artist's fare, come within."

Wolfson, tired and travel-stained, felt his heart glow at the warm welcome, for this boyish host was a safe friend to trust.

"But the horse, sir. Mistress Mary lent him to me——"

"Why, Dobbin—to the white splash on his nose!" cried Ross delightedly, as he patted the animal. "We will take him along to the 'Ferry Arms,' and afterwards we will look to ourselves."

It was not long before Dobbin was content in the stable, and Ross was ordering extra supper for his guest.

But while Ross was ruthlessly tossing a table-clearance to the floor to make room for the meal, Wolfson drew out a package, handed it to his host and then discreetly withdrew himself to the oriel window.

David Ross tore open the package, and first he unfolded a handsome ring, and then read the letter. It was written in the exquisitely fine lady's script of the period, but there was no conventional stiffness in the wording.

"To David—from Mary.

"How my poor brother would rage if he knew of this letter which I am sending by our good friend Wolfson and my dear Dobbin. You will welcome both horse and rider for my sake, and give Wolfson every help you can.

"He bears a petition against enclosure, and he will tell you of the anxiety and despair all around us. I much fear that the great will win the day, and the poor will go down. Why is it, David, that this happens so often? I cannot understand this strange world at all, and though I would confess it to none but you, I cannot understand God either.

"As yet my brother knows nothing of our betrothal, but on the next opportune occasion I will tell him, for it is not in my nature to keep secrets. I send this ring, which is of great value, and I would have you sell it, that you may pay good fees to counsel to present the case for our poor folk before Parliament. I fear that things will go badly with them, for

Mr. Strong and others are busy making vast promises to the larger commoners as to the share they may receive when the Commissioners sit to divide the land. And I fear that Parson Lutterby is more diligent over this business than over the preparation for his sermons.

"And now, how this poor heart of mine longs to know how you are, and whether your woundings still trouble you. How does the picture of the press-gang proceed? I exclaimed in horror only yesterday, when my brother rejoiced at the notion that the press-gang might do useful service in Bracken Fell. David—I fear I was born with boiling blood, for do what I will, I cannot get it cooled.

"Now, farewell—beloved. And for ever you will find a true heart in

"MARY MASON."

David pressed the letter fervently to his lips, then folded it and hid it, together with the ring, in his breast pocket, and called Wolfson to supper.

"I am kept in close touch with affairs in Parliament," said Ross. "I have learned that the Bracken Fell petition has already been presented by Lord Rawby, and the Bill is to come before the House for first reading, for in these matters the House has no object to serve in delay."

"It is because I know that, sir, that I have been so hard a taskmaster to Mistress Mary's good Dobbin."

"Ah!" exclaimed Ross. "I hear a step—I am expecting a clever young attorney to call—and if so, I shall have to send round to the inn for some heavier fare!" and as the door half opened, he turned with a gay laugh.

"Come in, Matheson—heartily welcome!"

"I hope I am!" said a soft woman's voice.

Ross swung round on his chair, then sprang up.

There stood Mary, with happy eyes and a whimsical smile about her mouth. Her loosened cloak showed her wondrous evening gown, while a ringlet or two had escaped from under her hood. A tall largely-built woman stood behind her.

"Mary!" so David exclaimed. Her hands were held out to him, his arm was about her, and they kissed with all the confidence of a great love.

Wolfson rose somewhat awkwardly, feeling himself out of place, but Mary offered him a swift glance of greeting.

"Yes, I have come, David!" she said joyously, "and this

is my woman, Mrs. Betsy Wainwright. So my good Dobbin has won to the post?" and she nodded towards Wolfson. "But I am interrupting your meal."

"What is a meal when you have interrupted a whole life?" he said, under his breath. Yet he frowned anxiously. "Dear lady—you ought not to be here."

"I know!" and she shrugged her shoulders; "but what would you? I had a fancy to celebrate my eighteenth birthday. It is a great age for a woman, which all the world should respect."

Ross drew up a handsome chair, threw over it a tiger's skin, and placed her in it.

"My old studio—the throne-room of a queen," said Ross whimsically, and suddenly he bent his knee and kissed her hand.

"Rise, sir courtier!" and her eyes shone with pure happiness, "for I have but scant time, being due at a ball."

"But when did you come?" asked Ross.

"I have been in London two days, for post-horses can beat my poor Dobbin. But already the Bill has passed its first reading, and it passes its second to-night. Lord Rawby is the introducer, and when it reaches committee—it is he who will take the chair and the evidence!"

"They have made good speed," said Wolfson bitterly.

"It is a way Parliament has when she acts as protector to the powerful," said David.

"By your leave, sir," said the weaver, "if you will let me sleep off my heaviness in yonder, I would be fitter to play what game has still to be played."

Whether his heaviness or his desire to leave the lovers alone was his motive, did not matter. He went to the inner room, and Mrs. Wainwright retired to the recesses of the window.

"Of course, you will blame me for coming, David?" she said wistfully.

"I do not blame—but I fear. My God, if it were possible for us to wed!"

"I would not mind if I had to live as poor as some weaver's wife if only we could be together, David. I can scarcely breathe in the Manor House, and I should stifle right out at Rawby Castle." Her lips twitched as she noticed that she had roused him.

"Rawby Castle, what mean you, dearest?"

"For days I have heard nothing save of the glories of Rawby Castle, Rawby coal, Rawby iron, and Lord Rawby himself, who followed fast to London behind us!" She gave a rippling laugh at his consternation, and went on teasingly, "David, there is no feature I possess, eyes, ears, nose, chin, teeth, which has not been the subject of language worthy of the heroes of Valhalla. Why have you never reminded me of all these wonders in my face?"

"You mock me——" yet his voice was anxious.

"If you were a compliment-monger, Mary Mason would certainly scorn you with the rest!" so she consoled him. Then, in low tones they talked of love and home, and the people and the Bill, until Mrs. Wainwright rose anxiously to urge that her mistress would surely be missed at the ball.

David had just folded her again in her cloak, and was arranging her hood, when Mary drew back with a sharp exclamation.

"As I wagered I should find them!" and Sir Peter strode into the room. "So—you scoundrel—you viper! Come outside and either take a horsewhipping or find your seconds."

"I do not fight," said David quietly, while Mary clung to his arm.

"Ah—I thought not—you coward; and your reason?"

"One reason is that I am a fine shot and my hand is steady," said David coolly, "the other is that I shall shortly have the honour of calling you my brother-in-law."

"Shortly?" and Sir Peter flung forth a volley of oaths. "You dare——"

"Yes—I dare——"

"So!" cried the other, losing all semblance of control, "you would offer marriage to my sister, because you have used her as you might have used a waiting maid!" Yet even as the unthinking words fell, he paled, for before him there stood the giant form of the weaver.

"A waiting maid, did your honour say?"

The young man shrank before the accusing finger, as before blinding lightning, and Wolfson had no mind to spare him.

"The plot thickens," he stuttered.

"Aye, your honour—it thickens."

Mary motioned to her woman.

"I will meet you at the ball, brother!" she said quietly.

"Mary—but what does this mean?" he demanded, seizing her by the arm and dragging her to a corner of the room.

"Don't, Peter. You hurt me! This means that your sister is a woman grown. She loves a man. She is going to wed him, and her brother will see to it that Mary Mason is not sent forth portionless——"

"I'll be damned——"

"Don't swear, Peter!" she said with a sudden uprising of affection in her tone. "You would do nothing against true love! David and I love one another, and I know—even if I had been but a poor waiting maid—that he would still be true to me!"

"What do you mean?" he breathed as though transfixed.

"Why—what should I mean?" she said, startled at his manner.

He loosened her arm. She went up to David and kissed him, then gripped Wolfson's hand, and motioning to her woman, she left them.

"Stay!" demanded Wolfson, as Sir Peter was about to follow his sister. And Sir Peter, in fear lest this man should give away a buried story, found himself compelled to yield.

"Look you, Sir Peter," said the weaver sternly; "a man may destroy the true love of his sister; he may thrust the poor from their right; he may tear to rags the honour of a waiting maid; he may wed with Pride herself; but the day will come when the prophet shall arrive in his presence and pierce his soul with the accusation 'Thou art the man!' I, John Wolfson, may have passed from the earth, but God has His prophets in every generation."

Sir Peter was too small a man to acknowledge his own doubt. The weaver's words filled him with an impotent fury which drove him from the room.

Long into the night, Wolfson toiled to explain the pitiful claims of those who had signed his petition. His audience consisted of half a dozen friends of Ross and the young counsel, Matheson.

Counsel admitted that there was but slender hope of success in Committee, and in vain the group raged over the way in which the rights of ordinary men were being overridden in every sphere of life by the daring of the powerful.

"What can one expect," said Ross, "when our members claim their seats as they claim their firesides, or buy them as they might buy a chariot in which to flaunt themselves abroad?"

XI

THE NEWS THAT TRAVELS FAST

Wolfson only stayed in London long enough to give counsel all the help in his power, for he was anxious as to Madge.

Before he left, however, he had the satisfaction of knowing that Mr. Ross had received a commission for a set of pictures on the life of the people, which would keep him in work and good pay for months, if not years. To accept such work filled Ross with artistic delight, and Sir Peter, swayed by worry and financial anxiety, moodily gave his consent to his sister's marriage, and a special licence was obtained.

So when Wolfson came to say good-bye, he found his honoured "Mistress Mary" engaged with Mrs. Wainwright in turning some empty rooms adjoining the studio into a home. Mary had but one demand, that he should leave Dobbin behind, and return north by coach.

Thus he arrived on foot from the main road, and came along by the common, where the villagers were busily gathering their share of hay for the coming winter.

Work stopped instantly at sight of him, and they crowded about him, asking the news with heart-sickening attention.

"Nay, friends," he pleaded, "let me get sight of my wife first."

"One word—aye or no?" pleaded the young blacksmith, Harry Vipond.

"Here she is!" called a lad who had rushed to be the first to tell the news at the weaver's cottage.

Madge came along, hurrying, trembling, carrying the child in her arms, and the villagers stood aside, and watched as Madge clung to her husband, and then lifted the babe to him.

"My good friends," he said, looking round, "see—here is Jack o' the People! We of this generation may go down—God knows how and God knows why—and Jack o' the

People may go down—God knows how and God knows why —but in the end—the end——"

"Look yonder—there he comes!" shouted a lad.

Attention was turned to Adam Strong, who came riding past, and the manufacturer was startled at the volley of hisses, groans and oaths which greeted him.

It needs a brave man with a good case to dare the wrath of a crowd, and Strong was certainly not a brave man unless he had the militia behind him. At the outcry he turned his bridle sharply, and his horse, excited at the uproar, pranced wildly, and the lads, all on edge to let off their energy, flung turf and rubbish, with the result that the rider was carried far over the common before he could regain control. The crowd howled derisively and joyously, forgetting in their hour of triumph that there were other hours to come.

Surrounded by the eager villagers, Wolfson told his tale. He cheered them by explaining that their claims were in good hands, and roused a shout of applause when he informed them that Mistress Mary had become Mistress Ross.

"And now listen, neighbours," he said, as he unfolded a paper. "Here is a copy of part of our petition. Yet remember that it is but a petition, and so long as no man fears our vote we are as outcasts in our own country."

And the anxious crowd, well realising that behind Wolfson's cheerful words black doom was lurking, pressed closer that they might hear.

"That the Petitioners beg leave to represent to the House that, under Pretence of improving Lands in the Parish of Bracken Fell, the Cottagers and other Persons entitled to Right of Common on the Lands intended to be enclosed, will be deprived of an inestimable Privilege, which they now enjoy, of turning certain Number of their Cows, Calves and Sheep on and over the said Lands: a Privilege that enables them not only to maintain themselves and their Families in the Depth of Winter, when they cannot, even for their money, obtain from the Occupiers of other Lands the smallest portion of Milk or Whey——" Wolfson paused. Then looked out towards the long strips of common fields where the slanting rays of the setting sun drew the long shadows of the haycocks lying under the dew.

"My God!" he cried, "I can read no more."

He put out his hand to Madge for support, and the two,

with the babe, passed away from the people and entered their cottage.

But many lingered about the green on that summer night, speaking low, and more than one wandered off to lay a hand on the beast he had reared, or to look with opened eyes upon humble possessions, poor enough, yet still his own.

"Madge, lass," said Wolfson, late that night, as they crouched by the fire fondling the baby's toes stretched out to the blaze, "I saw him."

"Yes?" she looked at him intently.

"And I lost my temper; but at least I moved him to act reasonably to Mistress Mary and the man she loves."

"You will help all men and women save yourself, John."

"Tell me, Madge, once again of the wedding at which he betrayed you."

"May we not forget?" and she shrank. "It was at Gretna—we promised—we signed—but it meant nothing—nothing but disgrace for me until you folded me in your arms, John."

He kissed her tenderly, then took the baby from her.

"Jack o' the People!" he whispered.

Madge rose that she might boil some milk, and Wolfson eyed her thoughtfully.

Her swift words had shot him through. His whole nature revolted against a thought that gripped him.

Suppose that Madge were not his wife after all? Suppose Sir Peter's betrayal was of a blacker hue than even he had dreamed. The thought was torture. He loved Madge with all the passion of a great soul, and he was only waiting until the babe was older to take her as his wife in very truth. And yet—suppose——. He fought an inward conflict of which Madge knew nothing as she boiled the milk and poured it into the mugs.

"Madge!" and his voice trembled, "suppose the two of us—he and I—stood together! Into whose arms would you go?"

Madge looked at him in amazement.

"Oh, John! You know! You know!" she sobbed, and she kneeled and laid her head on his knee.

And Wolfson swore to himself, as he smoothed her glossy hair, that he would never seek further into the truth. Yet as he swore he knew that one day he would be forsworn.

XII

A BETROTHAL GIFT

THERE is no enchantment like being in the swim of affairs, and Sir Peter, with the Bill proceeding prosperously, found himself in a rush of business excitement amongst men of enterprise, who frankly acknowledged their keenness for themselves and their families. Such men at least understood one another's point of view, and this understanding was a relief.

So doubt vanished, and Providence smiled through the opportune death of Lady Anne's uncle, whereby she found herself possessed of lands and coal in the north, and further smiled in the fact that Lord Rawby, stung by Mary's rejection of his suit, determined to show that he was not stung by entering into business with her brother. Indeed, Providence again took a hand by removing the member for Bishops End and suggesting to Lord Rawby that he should nominate Sir Peter as the new member.

It was true that Mary and her husband persisted in working strenuously against the Bill, but they knew only too well that their labour was but to satisfy their own consciences, and could have but one result—failure.

So it came about that one evening Lady Anne was seated at her desk—a business woman—when Sir Peter was announced.

"We are safely through," he said eagerly, "the rest is a formality."

"And the opposition?" she asked, as she rose.

"Parliament had agreed to hear their counsel, but at the critical moment we got a member to move an amendment that the petition should lie on the table, and counsel be not heard. There were but a handful in the House, talking idly, and the amendment went through; the petition lies on the table, and Lady Anne de Mandeville does me the honour to accept her betrothal gift—and to become my wife!"

He came near, took her hand, and saluted her on the cheek.

"You have done well, Peter," she said ceremoniously. "And, of course, I stand by my bargain—to be your wife."

Yet in this hour of success a shiver shot through him, but recovering swiftly, he put an arm about her and brought her to the sofa. She allowed his attentions with a dispassionateness which was certainly quelling.

"Dearest," he said earnestly, "you do not regret?"

"Do you?" she demanded sharply.

"Anne?" There was a wonderful reproach in his voice.

"There is but one thing I ask," and she watched him intently.

"To the limit of my inheritance," he protested. Then, as she frowned and shook her head, a passion to possess her overwhelmed him. "Anne—you are cold—cold—in this hour when I would have you——"

She smiled alluringly into his eyes, and drawing her to him he kissed her over and over.

"Yet your promise?" she said, as she released herself.

"You have a thousand promises!" he protested.

"You will rid the district of that strange woman?" and she looked at him narrowly.

"Why so small a demand!" he said with a light presence of mind.

"Is it so small? She frightens me. I cannot be lady of the manor so long as that woman lurks about the common."

"Unless the poor woman commits some crime——"

"You have ways—surely—of getting rid of undesirable people and—their husbands? Why——" and her eyes lightened, "won't the Bill do it?"

"What a clever little woman you are, Anne!" he said tenderly. "I had forgotten the Bill."

XIII

GRETNA GREEN AND AFTER

Wolfson made up his mind that so soon as he had done his best for his neighbours, he would carry Madge and her baby far out of range of the Manor House. Yet ever as he flung his shuttle, the horrible question gnawed until it became a tormenting rhythm beating into his brain. "Married or marred. Married or marred." He must get at the truth, in spite of the oath he had sworn to himself. After all, what difference could it make to know? Madge was his, let Truth reveal what she dared.

So he made up a half tale to Madge about searching for some new home, and with reluctance she let him go.

It was but a simple inquiry which he made at a certain famous resort in Gretna Green, yet as he waited for an answer,

a cold sweat set this Bracken Fell giant shivering like some poor snared rabbit.

The previous year, so he was informed, a party of the name of Peter Mason had married a party of the name of Madge Preston. The names were signed in due order. Wolfson thanked the "Priest" and walked away, the very sky blurred to his view. The child, then, was no "disgrace," and he—was not even Madge's protecting husband. He was merely—what was he?

The blow was agonising; yet Wolfson stood by his position.

For news had now come of the marriage of Sir Peter and Lady Anne, and cakes and ale had been flung out in lavish profusion for all to enjoy who would.

"Aye," sneered Vipond, "and they'll pay for it out of the life blood of the folks they rogue!"

Yet such is custom that the talk of the bride's home-coming stirred the people with a strange and pathetic loyalty. So what good could possibly come of telling the truth about Madge? Wolfson remembered that those who make no protest on the marriage day shall "for ever after hold their peace." Might he not do that with an easy conscience?

But there was one thought that seriously troubled the weaver. What about the boy? Jack was the squire's son—heir to the Manor.

So Wolfson argued one moment, the next he flared up indignantly. No! Jack was his mother's son, cast out from his father's house. He should grow up as a son of his mother's race—should take his place as heir to the people and the people's lot. And yet, even though this was his final resolve, Wolfson could not bring himself to bury the secret irrevocably.

Madge gave Wolfson a warm and tremulous welcome, and proudly showed him the growing strength of the boy. Over their first meal she poured out to him the tale of a countryside thrown into agitation and despair. The Commissioners were already sitting. They consisted of Sir Peter, his bailiff, Mr. Adam Strong, and a lawyer.

"Aye, John, lad, you are back!" said Vipond, as a little later Wolfson took the rough path to the smithy. "In time to see the carcass cut up and the vultures fly down to the feast?"

"Tell me all," said Wolfson, as he leaned against a bench.

And Vipond talked long and roughly, for his heart was hot within him.

"And mark you," he sneered, "every claim has to be set down in writing! There'll be dozens of scores who can only set their cross, and more who know nothing about their claims or their rights, except that their fathers and grandfathers and how many before them, the Almighty alone knows, fed their beasts and sowed their land, and slept under their own roofs!"

"Let every man bring in his claim to me," he said. "I will go myself before the Commissioners—let the chairman be the devil himself!"

Thus for a week it was known that Wolfson was receiving particulars of claims and leaving his loom to the dust. It was known also by the Commissioners that John Wolfson was the only man to fear of the poorer commoners.

It was a soft summer evening as Wolfson wandered along the common fields, now naked of hay and a grazing ground for cattle. He paused, looked, then passed onward, not noticing that Adam Strong drew rein in the distance and then galloped away.

When Wolfson arrived at Nancy's cottage, the woman greeted him eagerly, and for some time he suffered her garrulity.

He had become convinced of a certain wit and power in this woman, which she hid from the villagers by her mad ways, and in his emergency Wolfson felt that Nancy Fodderty was the one neighbour who might serve his purpose.

After much heart-searching, it became clear to him that when Jack grew up he must know the truth and then judge for himself. Yet who was to hold the secret? His own future was blankly uncertain, for at any moment he knew that crucifixion for his cause might descend upon him, for, indeed, what cause has ever been won save through crucifixion?

He had no illusions as to the consequences of his recent actions, nor of the incentive which both Sir Peter and Adam Strong must have to rid themselves of his presence. But by placing the secret in writing and delivering it to Nancy, it would be safe, for Nancy could not read, and would faithfully discharge his commission, as would some dog who remains at his post till death.

"Nancy," he said quietly, and with extreme gravity, "I

wish you to listen to me, with the part of you that no one can call mad."

"Aye?" she questioned, eyeing him intently.

"It may be that ill-luck may come on me—or on Madge."

The woman's face was motionless, and her voice was quiet.

"Mad Nancy has seen the ill-luck hiding behind John Wolfson's eyes."

He was startled at her penetration, but he smiled.

"Perhaps I was wrong to call it ill-luck. 'Tis the sorrow of God, struggling with men!" He buried his face in his hands, and she watched him silently. Presently he raised his head, and drew out a package, which she accepted wonderingly.

"I have sealed this packet, Nancy, and I leave it in your charge. I want Jack, the boy, to have it when he is full grown. For myself I have not so much as a day to call my own, and so I want you to hide it, and should anything happen either to me or to Madge——"

She was listening intently, then she turned and leaped up with a cry, as the door opened softly.

Another instant and the little kitchen was filled with a posse of officers. Wolfson leaped up also. The horror of horrors had descended. His Majesty's press-gang were seeking more men to fight the French or to be cast overboard through disease.

To struggle was useless. Wolfson was a prize worth securing, and landsman as he was, discipline and the lash would soon turn him into a seaman.

"Now my lad!" said the captain jocosely, as Wolfson felt the dread irons on his wrists, "you have your chance to serve His Majesty and win good prize money with the rest."

"'Tis your hour!" said Wolfson.

"He goes quiet!" laughed one of the men.

"Aye, I go quiet, captain!" said Wolfson. "'Tis not you who are taking me, but those who have sent you."

"What mean you?" demanded the captain roughly.

For answer he looked the captain in the eyes, and there was something in the dignity of his victim that brought a flush even to so tough and hardened a cheek.

"You scarcely came so long a journey inland without a heavy hint."

"Heavy enough in gold!" cried Nancy. "'Tis plain who set you devils to work, and I'll take care to tell him so!"

The captain laughed out uncomfortably, and raised his st.

" If we might but tear out the women's tongues ! "

And Nancy, gleaning the meaning from Wolfson's eyes, feigned a wild terror and fled from the cottage.

" She is but a poor mad wench," mocked the captain.

" Not so mad but what she may warn the village ! " said one of the gang, and at the hint some of the men dashed off, leaving others in charge of Wolfson.

But it was true enough that in securing Wolfson the captain lost the rest, for on searching the village only a few old men and a terrified crowd of women were to be seen.

But the sight of Wolfson, handcuffed and in custody, sent a thrill of horror through them.

" You are in no such hurry, sir, but that I may wish my wife and child farewell ? " he asked the captain respectfully.

The captain hesitated. This man was of a different sort from the rabble of cursing, blasphemous fellows with whom he had usually to be content.

But as though in answer to his wish, Madge, piloted by Nancy, rushed out with Jack in her arms, to prove for herself the truth of news too hideous to believe.

" 'Tis all right, Madge, lass ! " called Wolfson reassuringly.

" All right ! " she cried. " Oh, good sir ! " and she fell on her knees and clung to the captain's boot, " take him not. He is an honest weaver, and no sailor ! In God's name, captain, have pity—if you ever loved a woman or held such a babe as this in your arms——" and she raised Jack on high.

" Nay, good mistress," he said, not unkindly, " we do your good man great honour. He will win his stripes and come back with a fat bag of French gold to give to you and to yonder youngster ! "

" Come back ? He will never come back," she wailed. " Oh, John," and rising, she clung to him. " Why do you stand there dumb—as a sheep led to the slaughter ? "

A strange look crossed the man's face.

" Keep up a good heart, lass ! " he said steadily, " for my sake, for Jack's sake, and for the sake of the people." The marine to whom he was handcuffed eased his contact so that Madge might kiss him and kiss the manacled hand.

" Lift him nearer," he whispered. And Madge lifted the babe's cheek to his lips. " A strong heart and a brave soul, may Almighty God grant thee, Jack o' the People ! " he

murmured. Then his voice broke, and he turned on the captain with a face of anguish.

"Captain, of your mercy, get me away!"

The captain ordered the march sharply. The men moved off, but Nancy held on to Madge firmly.

"Break not his heart with thy weeping!" she urged.

"I know why he was taken! Leave me! Let me go home."

Nancy left her hold, and the people watched as Madge went back to her cottage and shut the door.

But the women and old men talked fiercely, and later, when the men crept out from their hiding places, every home was a centre of despairing and threatening bitterness.

It was fortunate that the captain had received a very heavy fee for his capture, otherwise he might have returned to the coast in an awkward mood. His only other victim was a stableman whom he caught as they left the village. Robbie Graham fought gamely, but in the end he found himself half-dazedly stumbling along the road, linked with the weaver.

When Adam Strong heard of the capture he smiled. He could now inform Sir Peter that one more obstacle in the path of progress was removed.

Personally he had no desire for able-bodied men to be pressed from the village. His mill was rising and machinery was being put up. Men, women and children would soon find themselves faced with a choice between what wages he chose to offer and the rigours of the poor law. The world was a world of wonder indeed for the few who possessed a steady hand.

XIV

A RIVER OF GOLD

It had rained for three days, and the beck had swelled to overflowing, but at mid-day it cleared, and the sun shone out enticingly upon a sodden world.

For three days Madge had debated with herself as to whether she should dare the Manor House and bury her pride by asking Sir Peter to rescue her husband. It was the thought that John would not wish it, that had held her gripped; yet her passion to save him dissolved her doubts at last, and taking her baby she hurried along by the river, hoping that she might meet Sir Peter on horseback. Pathetically she prayed that God would send him along the forest road as a sign that her

petition was to be granted. And if not—well—she thought wildly, there is always the river.

So she crouched amongst the wet bracken, and presently the slow thud of hoofs and the sound of voices and a merry laugh told her that her prayer had been heard.

Lady Mason uttered a cry of terrified dismay as Madge sprang up and stood rigidly in their path, and Sir Peter, scarcely knowing what he did, lifted his riding whip.

"Aye, Sir Peter!" cried Madge. "Strike—strike so long as you will!"

"My good woman," he said soothingly, "do you not see that you frighten my wife?"

Madge gave a wild laugh and seized Sir Peter's bridle.

"I will leave the country," she said in a hoarse whisper. "Bracken Fell shall never see us again—if you will bring back my husband to me."

"I?"

"Come," interrupted Lady Mason. "Why should this woman pester you?"

"They have taken him—John Wolfson—pressed him for the Navy!" she hurried on, taking no notice of the lady. "Buy him back for me with the guineas——"

"Woman," he exclaimed, "I have no power——"

"Where is that gold——" screamed Madge more wildly. "Did you leave it in the grass—down by the beech tree?"

"The woman is clearly mad," said Lady Mason.

"Mad!" repeated Madge. "Baby—he says he has no power." She lifted the child's face towards him, then clasped him passionately to her breast, and turning, fled down an opening towards the river.

"My God!" exclaimed Sir Peter, his face white with sudden fear.

"Don't be a fool!" said Anne hardly, dragging at his bridle. "Let the woman go!"

Madge went on stumblingly. "Gold! Gold!" she muttered. "There is no gold—no gold—and the world is sinking to hell to find gold. But the river—the river—it is golden—see—baby—a river of gold!"

"Poor soul," said Sir Peter controlledly. "'Tis Wolfson's wife. Mr. Strong told me the man had been pressed—a mischief-maker."

"Don't try to deceive me, Peter," and Anne smiled,

" And pray don't think that an affair with a village woman needs so much excuse-spinning. Men," and she shrugged her shoulders, " are but as God made them."

Somehow her moral lightness stung him exquisitely, but he had no chance to reply, for a wild cry quivered through the evening.

" She has done it ! " he shouted, and he broke away towards the river.

Anne followed him swiftly, for she had no intention of allowing him to commit any foolhardy act. Peter was already flinging himself off his horse and eyeing some dark object swaying down the river towards the waterfall.

" Peter—you promised me," so Anne stared at him. He returned her gaze, distraught, weakly uncertain.

" It is too late," she said steadily. " They are over—a happier end than a mad-house for the poor woman."

It was later that evening that Adam Strong called at the Manor House, and in casual conversation mentioned that a woman had been found drowned on the bank of the river.

" She happens to be that scoundrel Wolfson's wife. They say she threw herself into the river with her baby," he said in the eager manner in which men gossip.

" And the baby ? " asked Lady Mason lightly.

" Washed out to sea—one less of the Wolfson breed to trouble the country."

But Sir Peter, making a brilliant excuse, slipped away from the *salon* to calm himself, if that were possible, under the stars.

The mill-owner's news had moved him as he never expected to be moved again.

Madge—her beautiful eyes closed for ever, her sweet mouth choked in the cold water, the baby—his and hers—washed out to sea. The first flowering of his young love was withered and crushed out by his own hand. He had loved her, had betrayed her and—God ! how the thought tortured. Could he have saved her ?

But gradually his emotion subsided, and the devil of sagacious world-sense again came into his own. Life was at last clear from all fear of any future revelations. Whether the marriage had or had not been legal—well—it did not matter now. He could look about him confidently without ever again meeting those accusing eyes. And yet—the self-accusation still flamed and burned, and as he paced his heels

dug deeply into the soft turf. He wiped the perspiration from his brow irritably. If only he could go to some priest, confess his sin, endure the penance and get his absolution, and set out freely in life once more. But the Masons were a loyal Protestant family. Such an idea was folly.

He raised his head at the sound of Anne's gay voice, and saw her slender form silhouetted against the light as she stood on the terrace.

Yes, this was the real existence—and he sighed with an inconsequent relief. Providence had again come to his aid.

Anne advanced to the top of the terrace steps, and he leaped up them, and put an arm about her.

"Peter!" she said with an alluring gentleness, "I am happy at last."

"I am glad, dearest," he said, not inquiring what she meant.

And as he kissed her and pressed her to him, Anne decided that sleeping dogs might now lie on in peace. Wild oats had been sown and washed away by a raging flood.

XV

THE TRIANGLE

JOHN WOLFSON'S great limbs were fixed tightly to the triangle.

Men on board were drawn up at attention, Robbie Graham amongst them.

Only five hundred lashes, because Wolfson had obstinately refused to use his great strength in flogging a swearing, ne'er-do-weel comrade in that hell ship.

The captain was frankly sorry, for amongst the rabble forced upon him from jail and vagrant ward, out of whom he was expected to produce able-bodied seamen and gun food, this northerner stood out as of a different calibre. Such a fellow might rise to non-commissioned rank and win himself good prize money and the right to curse his underlings.

Still, discipline must be maintained, for apart from the triangle, how could they expect to beat the French and win world glory for all-glorious Britannia?

So the doom had fallen, and Wolfson nerved himself grimly as he heard the word of command for the first stroke to fall.

It fell, and strong man as he was, he could not control a

sudden shriek—a protest of Nature against her desecration—and the captain, seeing his chance, raised his hand to stop the punishment, and came forward to his victim.

"See here, man," he said urgently, "stop this folly. You shall be cut down if you will but obey."

"I can't, sir!" said Wolfson respectfully.

"Go on—a thousand!" said the captain. He strode away, and the surgeon drew closer, while Robbie, whose whole young life had been staggered at what he had seen during a long hideous month, cringed and glanced around him, amazed at the dull callousness of most of the men as they looked on at their comrade's terrible ordeal.

There is little left of a man's back after a thousand lashes have ripped their way through his flesh. At last it was over, Wolfson was cut down, carried below and attended with rough skill by the surgeon.

But, left alone, he had not strength to moan, and closing his eyes he lay motionless for long, not knowing that Robbie was keeping loyal watch by his side.

But presently he opened his eyes, smiled at Robbie, and closed them again with a sigh of apparent contentment. Now and again a man looked in to see how he did, for even in that short time, Wolfson had won his way to the hearts of the roughest of his despairing and undone mates. The usual filthy jibes at religion had dissolved before Wolfson's compassion, his comradeship and his passion to help wherever he saw an opening. Even in his extremity of anguish at being carried off, it had been impossible for him to consider himself alone, and when actually on shipboard, his heart went out to the wronged sailors as it had gone out to the people of Bracken Fell. For was not all this part of the same problem?

The grabbing of the commons, the grabbing of colonies, the grabbing of power? The world was nothing but a grabbing ground, and the grabbers cared not whether their prizes were won at the expense of black, white or yellow foreigners, nor did they even care, so long as they could shut their eyes, about the pain of the child who ought to have been playing under God's sunlight at their very door.

But as Robbie crouched heart-brokenly near his friend in the stench of the hateful hold, Wolfson lifted his arm, groaned at the movement, and opening his eyes, he stared towards Robbie unseeingly, as he called in a low compelling tone:

"Pretty lass! Pretty lass! Come! 'Tis milking time."

Robbie sat back and his cheeks flushed. He laid a hand on Wolfson's burning brow.

"'Tis fever!" he breathed. "He calls his cow from the common."

What if Wolfson should die—his one standby on this floating hell? How could he bear it?

Robbie got some water, none too fresh, and having induced Wolfson to sip, he was thankful to see that recognition returned.

"Robbie, lad?"

Robbie took his hand.

"When thoo goes back—tell my little Jack that his father died for the people."

"Thoo must not die. Thou art better!" pleaded Robbie.

"Nay, lad—I'm done!" He closed his eyes.

"But thy wife!" said Robbie, hoping to rouse him.

"Madge!" The man looked round the dismal hold. "Madge!" The voice was exultant. What Wolfson could see, Robbie could not guess.

"Madge—thy little Jack! My little Jack!" The voice dropped lower. Then suddenly he raised himself, gasping. "Air! My God! Air!"

Robbie breathed in dismay the stifling atmosphere. Where was he to get air for the dying man? He sought to raise his head, not daring to put an arm near the tortured back, but Wolfson groaned heavily against him.

"Air!" He closed his eyes. His lips moved. Robbie bent to listen. He thought he could distinguish three words which broke into the darkness. "Madge—Jack—the People!"

Then there was silence, save for the motion of the boat, and the rush of the waves against her.

Robbie raised his head—swearing at the atmosphere—gasping for breath, as once more he leaned down over the dead body of his friend. But with John Wolfson there was light and air and motion and life for evermore.

Presently he became aware of strange sounds, shouts and commotion. He was roused by a violent cuff on his head and a rough hand on his shoulder, followed by an order to go on deck, well larded with the filthiest oaths.

Robbie staggered up.

"We are clearing for action! Get up there, or the rope-end——"

"But—he is dead!" The boy's voice broke.

The man turned sharply and looked down on the dead man. Wolfson had done him a kindness but the day before. He shrugged his shoulders, but even his callous heart had to acknowledge to a stab of pain.

"He's lucky!" he said gruffly.

EPISODE II

1805

I

NANCY'S JACK

EVERY one round Bracken Fell and Bishop's End knew Nancy's Jack, the foundling son of a gipsy woman, so the legend ran, and Jack certainly fulfilled the *rôle*, for there were occasions when he was as wild and untamed as his "Granny," as he called Nancy.

He lived a life of freedom not possible for the other boys and girls whom Mr. Adam Strong needed in his mill; for away in London there lived a fairy godmother, who provided Nancy with her cottage, her garden and her orchard, and though Nancy could no longer graze geese on the common, good money came regularly to her hand. Nancy lived in her old simplicity, and saved money with a miserly enthusiasm, in order that one day Jack might build a mill for himself and ruin Adam Strong. So far Nancy's poor intellect reached, for in these years the building of mills and the sinking of shafts appeared to be the only road to glory.

But, in the meantime Jack learnt much from Mr. Dolling, the Methodist shoemaker, and read ravenously whatever books he could lay hands on. The boy found strange books in Nancy's cottage, bearing the name of a mysterious being named John Wolfson.

"Granny!" said Jack, as he looked up from his reading one autumn evening, "why will ta never tell me about John Wolfson?"

Nancy's fingers worked rapidly at her spinning, and Jack stopped the wheel with his hand.

"Tell me where he is, granny."

"God knows!" said Nancy.

"I wonder if He does?" Jack puckered his brows and tossed his head sceptically.

His dark eyes, dark hair, his humorous mouth, and his brilliant teeth certainly bore out the legend that this boy was a gipsy's son. He now threw a fine log on the fire, and raked at the embers to awaken the flames.

" And where did ta find yon log ? " asked Nancy.

Jack's eyes twinkled.

" I picked it from the squire's wood. Yon fellow Richards shouted after me, but he's over stiff in his joints for Nancy's Jack, granny ! "

For Jack was a thief, as any free savage is a thief. He stole wood and furze, nuts and game without any evil conscience, for Nancy had always impressed it upon him that these things were his own as much as the squire's. Jack readily believed his granny, for she had the same power of impressing him as she had of impressing the villagers, and Jack delighted in stealing for the cottage fire, and did not stick at reaping fat ears of corn for the poultry from the big farmers, who were rapidly getting their enclosed lands into good order and profitable working.

More than once Jack had almost been caught and punished, but somehow he had escaped, for it was vaguely known that the boy was under the protection of the squire's sister, " Mistress Mary " as she was still called by some of the older inhabitants of Bracken Fell.

Mary and David Ross seldom came north. It was a difficult and expensive journey, and David found his artist's career did not leave much margin, with his wife and a rising family to keep, and Mary, as a good mother, felt that her children had the first claim. Yet they never forgot to send the allowance they had promised, and four times a year Jack wrote a dutiful letter of thanks.

On this evening, Jack, having worked up a blaze to his satisfaction, took down his fiddle from a nail, and tucking it against his cheek, he played until Nancy's eyes glittered, and she clapped her hands and sent forth her well-known laugh.

It was Mistress Mary who had given the boy the fiddle, and Mr. Dolling who had set Jack on the road. But Jack had wandered far afield of the teachings of Dolling. He experimented on his own account, made up his own tunes, or caught up the old ballads from his neighbours, or the dances, once played on the village green.

Jack was, indeed, famed for his fiddling, his thieving and his extraordinary gift of song. He had been called upon to sing in the church choir, but Nancy had resolutely refused to allow it.

"Nancy's Jack shall never sing to please Parson Lutterby and the Manor House pew," she declared bitterly.

So Jack, taught from babyhood to hate parson and squire, readily obeyed his granny, and sang out in the woods, climbing the trees that he might learn of the very birds, and startling the passers-by with his wild song.

But Jack, tiring of the fiddle, took up a book, and was half reading, half reciting the thrilling ballad of Edwin and Angelina, when hearing a footstep outside, he leaped up as a dog might leap. For Jack was now his granny's guardian, her gardener, her poultry-keeper and, when necessary, her nurse.

There was a low tap at the door, and Jack opened it cautiously.

"Does Mistress Nancy Fodderty live here?" asked a tall man, in a deep pleasant voice.

"Aye!" admitted Jack. "Will you please to step in, sir?"

The man entered. He was in naval uniform, and Nancy peered at him uncertainly.

"Well, Mistress Fodderty," he said bluntly, "I have found you at any rate. It's not many I can find!"

Jack was filled with wondering admiration of this man, with his great strength, his bronzed face, his eyes, on which the tallow candle shed a quivering, uncertain light.

"But who art thou, lad?" and Nancy rose tremulously.

The man drew nearer and took her hand.

"What? Why—it's Robbie! Robbie Graham!"

To Jack's consternation, his granny sank back and broke into such a passion of weeping that he flung himself down on the arm of her chair and put an arm about her.

"Nay now, Mistress Fodderty," said the young man anxiously, "I have done wrong to startle you!"

"Robbie, Robbie!" she cried. "It is as if the very sound of thy name brought back the days when——. Has ta been round Bracken Fell?"

"Aye!" he admitted. "Two hours I have spent seeking for the old landmarks. It is no surprise that you should weep for the old days—but Mistress Fodderty, you at least are left in peace?"

"At the divide they said I could stop if I could fence! As if poor Nancy could fence. Adam Strong offered me five

pounds, to buy me up, as he had bought up three dozen. But it was Mistress Mary, God bless her, who bought me up, and I'm rent free to my grave. And I'm free of Adam Strong and all! Them that lives in his houses must work at his mill, but Nancy and Nancy's Jack are free."

"Jack?" and he looked at the boy.

"Aye, sir, I am Nancy's Jack," said Jack, keenly listening.

"I am seeking for John Wolfson's Jack?" and Robbie frowned, "but they tell me his mother drowned herself, and the baby was washed out to sea."

"Aye, there's a deal of tales gets telt in t' village," admitted Nancy. But Jack's nerves began to tingle. Perhaps this stranger was to give him the secret his granny had always refused. Nancy turned, and took the boy's hard hand in hers.

"Listen Jack, while I tell Robbie a tale."

So Nancy told how after John Wolfson had been pressed, his wife went crazy and threw herself into the river with her baby.

"But folk had forgotten Nancy Fodderty," said the woman proudly. "Even God may have to use poor mad Nancy when He is short-handed. It was Nancy who waded in to her middle and gripped the babe from the tree trunk where his mother had left him, and brought the breath back into his body; and yon child has been the joy of my poor life and——"

"Granny!" interrupted Jack, "you mean that I am no gipsy—I am John Wolfson's son?"

"Aye!" and she looked at him fearfully.

But the boy leaped up, walked away, and perched himself on the window-seat and peered into the darkness. But he could not hear well what Robbie was saying, so restlessly he came closer and kneeled on the hearth.

"T' lad was only asking me this night where John Wolfson was; and I telt him that God alone knew."

"Aye, and that's true enough!" admitted Robbie.

It was a tragic tale to tell, of the murder of the weaver under the lash, and Robbie told it with a rush of passion which sent the blood flaming to Jack's cheeks, and the angry light quivering in his dark eyes. By the end of the story the boy was standing upright, with clenched hands and firmly set feet.

"He sent tha a message, Jack," said Robbie softly.

"Aye?" panted the boy.

"He said, 'Tell my Jack that his father died for the people!'"

The boy stood speechless, as though he had scarcely heard. Nancy laid a warning hand on Robbie's knee.

"God!" exclaimed the boy dictatorially, "Go—tell my father that Jack o' the People still lives!"

II

KITTY VIPOND REBELS

EVERY morning along the rough road which led through the copse wood to Bracken Fell and the mill, a rough cart might be seen jolting along, crowded up with boys and girls from the workhouse.

Mr. Strong had raked the homes clean of the children, and the parish was glad enough to hire out these juvenile paupers, who could not be taught to earn their keep too early.

Jack, awake with the lark, roamed the countryside joyously during the early mornings, and the boys and girls looked out eagerly for this strong, free boy who could run as he chose and shout as he liked. Jack greeted them gaily, and many a gift of apples, gooseberries and nuts were tossed into the cart, and sometimes he managed to steal half a baking of Nancy's oatcakes for these prisoners of labour.

For the barest necessities of life the children trotted from fifteen to twenty miles a day after Mr. Strong's mules, and when legs ached and eyes ached, and every part of their beings ached to escape the noise and the stench and the driving of the overlookers, it was at least something to hail Nancy's Jack as their friend.

Kitty Vipond was the daughter of the young blacksmith and had been born in the workhouse a month or so after her father had been transported to Botany Bay for rioting when the common was fenced in. Her mother had died at her birth, and now for five years she had worked at the mill, and was the recognised leader of the rough demoralised youngsters.

But on this morning Kitty was in trouble. Having received a severe flogging at the mill, she had flatly refused to get into the cart, and, in consequence, her feet had been tied together, her hands tied behind her, and she stood in one corner with her angry blue eyes shining out from her wan face.

The other boys and girls wondered tremulously how Kitty's obstinacy would end. Kitty wondered herself, as she nerved herself proudly for another battle when she reached the mill.

And then it was that a glorious song shot out from above the noise of the rattling cart.

"Jack! Nancy's Jack!" yelled Kitty.

Jack, from his perch in a tree, had heard the cart for some moments, but as Kitty's cry reached him he stopped singing, and as, on peeping down through the branches, he saw the girl with the bound hands and indignant eyes, he scrambled down the trunk of the tree and dashed along the rough road.

But Jack was swift in decision as any hunter, and he put his finger to his lips to quell the girl's cry and to suggest caution to the others.

Kitty had the sense to obey, and the children watched developments fearfully enough, for the terror of authority had cut deep into their souls. What would happen to their favourite playmate, if she persisted in her dangerous insubordination?

But Jack, with gay optimism, thought only of the moment. Kitty had appealed to him in her humiliation, and with a mind stored by Nancy with old fairy tales of princes who rescued fair maidens, and tinker's sons who rescued princesses, Jack took on the *rôle* with enthusiasm.

Calculating that if only the children would keep quiet the rumbling of the cart would hide his action from the driver, he advanced on tiptoe and swung himself up behind. Pulling a heavy knife from his belt he slashed through Kitty's bonds, and handing over the knife, Kitty cut the ropes at her feet before the awe-stricken children. Free at last, it was easy work to slip over the edge of the cart into the road.

The cart rattled on. The children whispered and shivered in their scanty clothing. But the mill bell clanged out louder and louder, and as they were a little late the going became more jerky and painful, for they must surely arrive before the last clang. Six o'clock in the morning it was, and at seven that night they would emerge again into the darkness and the cold cart would take them off once more to the cold workhouse welcome.

But Jack was looking at his damsel whom he had rescued out of the blood-thirsty hands of the Giant of the Mill. She was a strange princess in disguise, and for an instant he wished

she had light curling hair flowing down to her feet according to the legends instead of being cropped as it was, close to her head.

Though he and Kitty had for long had a nodding and, it must be confessed, face-making acquaintance, Jack had never had this amazing chance of taking full charge, and the responsibility made him grave.

Shrewdly he dismissed the notion of taking her to his granny's.

There was no knowing what some terrorised child might confess, and authority would then make at once for Nancy's cottage.

"Come, Kitty!" he said rather anxiously, for he saw that with the success of the venture fear had dawned in her eyes. "There is nowt to fear!"

"Whisht!" breathed Kitty, and she put up her hand.

The mill bell could be heard through the morning air. The sound dominated the old common; it penetrated the squire's woods; it sounded unheeded in the night-nursery at the Manor House; it roused Adam Strong to rise to make sure that his business was going unfalteringly.

"The bell!" faltered Kitty.

"Thoo's afraid of t' bell?" Yet he gave a worried laugh.

Kitty stared blindly through a sudden fury of tears.

"I hate it! Hate it! Hate it!" she stormed; "and I hate the big horrible machines—thud! Clang! Jack!" and she seized his arm and looked at him with wild eyes, "it won't never stop! It goes on and on—Nancy's Jack, how can thoo tell what it is like inside yon mill?"

Jack pulled out an apple and thrust it into her hand.

"See here, Kitty," he said with a manly decision, "thee bide here, and I'll away to fetch us summat to eat and a sup of milk, and then we'll go to a spot where none shall ever find us."

"Thoo's sure?" she asked doubtfully.

"Sure!" he insisted.

Jack was not long in returning, bringing with him a can of milk, oatcakes, butter, and some fat slices of cold bacon. Kitty's eyes glistened, but he explained that they must find some safer spot before they sat down to the feast.

Presently they reached the face of a limestone cliff, behind which there could come no surprise. The feast was spread

and Jack watched with excited indignation the way the half-starved child devoured the simple fare.

"And do you have this every day, Nancy's Jack?" she demanded.

"Aye!" he admitted, somewhat ashamedly, "but tell me about the mill?"

"I want to think nowt about the mill," she returned. She had drunk the last drop of milk, and was absent-mindedly picking up any crumbs that were left.

"If you will tell me, Kitty," said Jack enticingly, "I will marry you one day!" and he swept his cap from his head and put out his hand.

Kitty looked into his eyes. Jack gave her a bold wink. Then Kitty gave a glad laugh, and put her hand in his.

"I, Kitty, take thee—Jack!" and her eyes danced. "Old Billy in the workhouse once told me what they say."

"Aye—that's what they say, 'I, Jack, take thee—Kitty!'"

The boy looked round, then suddenly leaned forward and kissed her.

Kitty did not shrink, but she sat back thoughtfully.

"There's nobody does that—kisses, I mean—in the workhouse!" she commented.

By one consent they rose together, and Kitty pulled Jack towards a small shining pool of fern-bordered water.

"I want to see myself!" said Kitty. "Folk can't see themselves in t' workhouse."

She gazed down into her own eyes, and Jack looked at her thoughtfully.

"I isn't a beauty!" she announced. "Why mayn't I have my hair long same as the squire's little girl? She comes on Christmas Day to see us eat our pudding."

"When you are my wife, Kitty, you shall have your hair all trailing on the ground, with golden combs in it and pearls and diamonds shining amongst it!"

"And roses—real roses that smell—fresh every day?" she demanded.

"Aye!" said Jack, "and shoes with silver buckles."

"When I am your wife, Jack," said Kitty confidently, "all the lasses shall do their hair as they like, and have looking-glasses to see themselves in, and have silver buckles!" Kitty stooped, kicked off her worn clogs, and revealed a very grubby pair of feet.

"I am going to wash them," she announced.

Kitty washed her feet, her hands, her face, and then flung herself down with a sigh of pure pleasure.

Jack was refraining from asking her about the mill, when Kitty began herself, for, after all, the mill was her life and bounded all her horizon.

"Thirteen hours locked in, and you can't get out. You can't—can't; and the smell is there—on and on. You drink it. It is in your food. And you get dry for water, but we mayn't sup water in the mill."

"But what did thoo get tied up for?"

"Because I wouldn't go! They flogged me yesterday." Kitty stopped, for a rabbit was peering at her, and darted away. "Yon rabbit isn't locked up in a mill. He can go to bed when he likes."

"Aye!" admitted Jack.

"There was one of our lot—a lass—she is seven, and she had to run back and forward piecing. Folks say we run twenty miles every day, but I don't know. Sally sat down and cried, and asked what time it was. But in the mill it's like as if the clock stops. When they said there was another two hours, Sally wouldn't get up. She sat, and the machine went on, and t' spinner pinched her, and Sally screamed, and I—I——" Kitty's hands clenched as she went on. "I leaped at him, same as a cat might, and I scratched his face, and clung to him, and then they pulled me off—it took two to pull me off—and they flogged me!" She took off her thin shawl. "See—my frock—behind—it's stuck where it bled!"

Jack's face expressed such horror that Kitty laughed.

"It's nowt!"

"But my granny would put some stuff on it," he said thoughtfully.

Kitty gave another pitiful laugh at the boy's solicitude.

"Old Billy says it is worse down Lord Rawby's pit than at Mr. Strong's mill," she said. "It is dark down there, and they sit and sit, waiting to open the trap-doors and sometimes—" Kitty leaned towards him with a face of horror—"there are rats—and you can't see them—and they——"

But a noise was attracting Jack's attention. He stood up suddenly and spoke under his breath.

"Come, I'll show you something, and they won't see us."

Kitty followed, not understanding, and, pushing through some tangled brushwood, they came in view of a forest road.

There was a sound of horse's hoofs, laughter and chattering voices.

A tall rider was in front—Sir Peter Mason himself—and by his side was a boy on a pony, and following came two ponies ridden by a boy and girl, while a liveried manservant brought up the rear.

"Why—yon is the squire's miss, with the long yellow curls," she cried, entranced.

"Aye, and t' squire and his son Malcolm. He'll be Sir Malcolm some day, and behind was Lord Rawby's son. They call him Dick. T' lass is Miss Catherine."

"My name is Catherine—Catherine Vipond!" said Kitty. "Why should she have a pony and long hair, and me be locked up in Mr. Strong's mill?"

But Jack could not answer, and Kitty continued breathlessly:

"Old Billy says Lord Rawby stole the coal from God."

"My granny says that there is no God, only a big, big devil," said Jack. Then he paused thoughtfully, and pointed to the rising blue of the morning. "But I don't think as the devil could be big enough to make yon sky and them woods and the coal, iron, and such like."

"Happen not," admitted Kitty, trying to face the problem. "Happen the devil has God fastened up in hell, and has thieved the world to give it to Mr. Strong."

"And Lord Rawby and Sir Peter Mason," said Jack, charmed with Kitty's notion. "Come on a bit higher, and thoo can see their pits."

Jack took his companion along a track which brought them to a point where they had a view of the developing collieries. The various pit heads were clear enough, and so were the rows of dingy cottages hastily thrown up to house those who brought the treasure to the surface.

"Last week," said Jack, "a boy at the cage forgot his job—he was watching a mouse—and four men were killed."

"Real dead?"

"Aye. My granny says it is murder to set a boy to let folk down the pit."

"Oh!" cried Kitty, as she clung to Jack's arm. A strange

roaring and booming sound seemed to shake the very rock on which they were standing.

Jack and Kitty, as they gazed with startled eyes at the blackened countryside, knew well enough what that thunderous rumbling meant. Men, women and boys were writhing and choking out of the world, or lingering in the bowels of the earth in an agony of suspense or pain.

"Come, let us get down there," cried Kitty excitedly.

But Jack looked doubtfully at the child in her tell-tale workhouse frock and shawl.

But Kitty, rejoicing in this wild freedom in an almost unknown world, tugged at Jack's hand, and the boy yielded, only too willingly.

Picking their way over the wastes, they pressed in amongst the throng now besieging the top of the shaft. Old men and young men not on the shift rushed out, and the women battled with one another to get nearer, and the boy and girl noticed that above the heart-breaking wail there rose an angry note, rough and strong and menacing.

"Old Billy," whispered Kitty, "will hear—and he will shake his fist and stamp his foot, and then he will sit down and cry."

"Why?"

"Because his wife and three boys died in the pit, and Old Billy says they might have been rats in a drain for all Lord Rawby's father cared."

"Rats!" repeated a fierce voice at their elbow. "Aye—more rats down yonder!" and a collier with one arm stretched it out towards the shaft. "Whether it is the war or the colliery—what do they care about the 'rats'?"

Joe Tempest pushed onward to find out for himself what dreadful contents the cage held as it reached the surface. On whom had the luck of the pit fallen this time?

III

MALCOLM

But the sound of the explosion had gone far, and the riding party, on its way to enjoy a hearty breakfast at Rawby Castle, was startled, and Sir Peter did not limit his oaths as he drew rein.

"The colliery, sir?" asked his son, Malcolm. The boy's face had gone sensitively white.

"I suppose so," said his father, looking worried.

"Oh, do let us go off and see, sir," said Dick, Lord Rawby's son. He was an insolent, domineering boy of ten, spoiled by flattery and attention, and under no rule save that of his father and his tutor.

But the little girl, called by Jack, Miss Catherine, pouted and drew her horse nearer to her father.

"We don't want to see dead people, Malcolm," she said petulantly. "I want to see Dick's rabbits."

"Catherine is right, boys," said Sir Peter. "Lady Rawby will be waiting for us—so come," and putting spur to his horse, he went off at a sharp trot, with Catherine cantering by his side.

But Sir Peter had miscalculated the power of curiosity in boys, for he had no sooner rounded a corner when Malcolm turned his pony smartly in the direction of the pits. It was in vain that the manservant remonstrated. Malcolm was off, and Dick, not to be outdone, followed him.

"Why, yonder is—him!" said Kitty, as she noticed Malcolm, followed by Dick, picking their way over the rough ground. "I'd like to steal their ponies, and thee and me gallop off with them for ever and ever!"

Jack looked at his companion with increasing respect. He liked the unexpected things she said.

But an ominous silence was gripping the colliers. The cage had risen, and through the hushed air there rose a woman's cry and a man's fierce shout.

Jack and Kitty wriggled themselves into the loosening crowd, but almost immediately they came rushing back, their eyes staring with horror.

"Lads—two little lads," gasped the girl.

Malcolm heard, and pulled his pony closer.

"What is the matter at the pit?" he asked anxiously.

"Twins—of seven—dead, master!" Kitty answered, dropping an alarmed curtsey.

"Why—is that all?" asked Dick, with a pout.

"Oh, Dick—all?" remonstrated Malcolm.

But attention was turned to Joe Tempest. Beside him walked a younger woman, his daughter, and each of them carried a small blackened bundle.

"My last grandsons!" shouted the man, all distraught.

"Take 'em to Rawby Castle and lay them down at his feet," shouted one of the crowd of eager sympathisers.

Joe started. The idea pleased him. He paused uncertainly, and caught sight of the two finely dressed boys on their smart ponies. The sight seemed to drive him mad.

"You can ride your ponies—you can sleep your sleep out—you can fill your bellies with the fat of the earth!" His voice rose higher and ever more bitter, and in an instant the boys found themselves the centre of an angry crowd.

"Send the owners' cubs down the pit and let them die like rats!" he stormed, and ever he pressed his dead grandson closer.

The effect on the two boys of this onslaught from a crowd that had ever treated them with obsequious, if sullen, respect was different in each case.

Dick's face flushed angrily, and he pulled at his reins and raised his riding whip.

"Get out—you—you dogs!" he screamed hysterically, "or my father will put you in jail."

Dick's inexperience could scarcely warn him that a crowd of desperate and despairing colliers could not be dared by a boy of ten, let him be ever so much a nobleman's son.

"Pitch the young hound down the pit," shrieked a woman. "Let him sweat and choke and cry for his mother!"

The boy's bridle was seized, his whip was snatched from him, and he was helpless in their hands.

"Aye—put them both down the pit, and let them sit their thirteen hours at the trap, till their fathers put in yon upcast shaft they promised!" shouted another, and Malcolm found his bridle seized.

But the older boy, horrified at the disaster, won his presence of mind through his honest compassion.

"What did my father promise?" he shouted in a clear, fearless voice, as he rose in his stirrups.

"He promised an upcast shaft, and he lied!" said Tempest. "Your father is a murderer—see!" and he showed the ashen face of his grandson.

"Both their fathers are murderers!" screamed a woman. "Come—what are you waiting for, eh?"

Now Sir Peter had never noticed that the boys had left him until he was close to the Castle, and he was too

anxious to consult Lord Rawby, with whom he was now joint owner of the Bishop's End collieries, to trouble himself in the matter.

The explosion was maddening, inopportune. In spite of the war boom and the handsome bounties given to get men down the pits, there was seething trouble at Bishop's End. The bounties were now happily dwindling, and the influx of workers from the land was levelling down the wages satisfactorily, but the colliers were getting sadly out of hand. Their grievances were legion, as Lord Rawby complained. If it wasn't one thing it was another. The want of a ventilating upcast shaft, the hours of work, the tommy shop at which they were forced to spend a heavy proportion of their wages, their fines, their homes, their yearly bindings, the weighing-in of their tubs.

"And if they can't invent grievances of their own, there are always scoundrels ready to stir them up," declared Sir Peter.

But the owners, now in consultation, were bound to admit that this explosion, due to delay in putting in the upcast shaft, would be likely to drive the colliers to extremities, and it would be well to take precautions against any awkward rioting.

"I have already sent off my best horse and rider to Oldcastle," said Lord Rawby with a sigh of satisfaction. "The authorities are warned."

"One hates the idea of the military," said Sir Peter, frowning, "but these fellows have no notion of working peaceably. They are capable of any mad action, and we are bound to secure the pits."

"A good flow of beer might be a trump card, but it is dangerous gaming," laughed Lord Rawby.

But they were interrupted by Catherine, as she burst into the room.

"Please, sir, the boys have not returned, and the groom says they would go down to the pit."

Sir Peter sprang up with an oath.

"I didn't want to see a pile of dead men," said the child superciliously, "and mamma will be very anxious if she knows that Malcolm is not here."

Catherine's prim sentences had their effect. His wife had developed into a nervous, self-absorbed woman, whose whole

object in life was to prove her delicacy. Sir Peter knew well that he would receive cold welcome at the Manor House if Anne discovered that her idolised son had been riding about alone in these turbulent times.

He therefore suggested to Lord Rawby that they should go down to the colliery, see the manager, and learn the extent of the damage. It was an unpleasant task, but unpleasant tasks had sometimes to be undertaken.

Some gentlemen of the house party volunteered to come with them, and so it happened that a dozen riders were advancing over the crest of the hill, as Malcolm and Dick were finding themselves helpless in the hands of the angry crowd.

"Serve them right!" said Kitty vindictively.

Now Jack didn't care a snap of the fingers what happened to Dick, but at sight of Malcolm's distress an unexpected sense of loyalty came over him.

Malcolm had once delivered him from rough handling by the keeper, Richards, and in return, Jack had shown Malcolm a heron's nest. It was not a great bond between them, but it was enough to make Jack use his lungs to give a yell of warning to the jostling crowd.

"Get out, Nancy's Jack!" they mocked. "What need thoo to stand by these young whelps, eh?"

But Nancy's Jack, to these unlettered and superstitious colliers, was something of a wonder-boy. He worked neither in pit nor mill, yet he was no gentleman, as was clear enough. So when he made his fierce outcry, some drew back and allowed him to seize Malcolm's bridle.

It is questionable, however, as to whether Jack alone could have secured the boy from very rough handling had not a new cry arrested them.

"It is their fathers, not t' lads, you should fling down the pit!"

It was Nancy who spoke. She was always worth attention, and there was a movement to hear what she had to say.

Nancy, after twelve years, still retained her wiry strength and lithe activity, and on hearing the explosion she had hurried across, confident that she would find Jack on the scene.

"Ha! ha! ha! Nay, lads," and she pointed derisively in the direction of the Castle, "it is yonder you should go."

But, as the colliers turned, they shrank back at the alarming sight of a dozen riders, and amongst them the rulers of their

daily destinies, descending at a smart pace towards the shaft. It was easy to utter brave words when no danger lurked, but these few riders had the instant effect of cowing the fearful and making every man and woman take a hasty view of the position.

Their wrongs cried to the heavens. Their own folk were being brought dead or maimed to the surface—yet to lay hands on the masters' children might undo whatever poor claim at redress they might make.

"By Gad!" exclaimed Lord Rawby, "those devils have got our lads at their mercy."

The word was enough, and the riders galloped into the crowd, scattering it to all sides. But scattering a crowd with horses will not break its soul unity, and every man and woman who fled, cursed in his or her embittered soul.

"They want to throw us down the pit," wailed Dick.

Lord Rawby, slashing right and left, reached his son, now almost in hysterics with fright.

"Cowards!" he stormed to the few who remained to hear his onslaught. "Cowards, to terrify children!"

But Joe Tempest and his daughter had not fled. They stood holding their stiffening bundles in their arms. Joe took a step forward.

"Coward, you!" he cried bitterly. "None heard the cry of these children when they were carried down into the pit. None listened when the dark terrified them. None heeded when they pleaded for an hour in the sunlight. Your honour knows these children have died for want of the shaft he has refused to sink. My lads are also flesh and blood, though they don't ride ponies, but are lying dead at your feet!"

Motioning to his daughter, they laid the children down side by side, uncovering their ashen, coal-begrimed faces.

There was a moment's pause, but it was broken by a wailing burst of sorrow and indignation.

The cage had come up again, and more families had their suspense changed to a hideous certainty.

But Lord Rawby had seen some blood trickling from his son's wrist, and the sight drowned any notion of compassion for the grief-stricken mother and grandfather. That a collier should have dared to draw blood from his son was the limit of ruffianism, and Dick, noticing the scratch, sobbed wildly with the rising passion of a spoiled child.

As for Malcolm, he sat quiet, absorbed in the amazing situation, nervous, but holding himself in hand, glad that the gipsy boy was at his bridle.

"Are you hurt?" demanded his father fussily.

"Oh no, sir. This boy saved me!"

"And who are you, lad?" he asked condescendingly.

"I am Nancy's Jack, your honour!"

"Aye, your honour," came in Nancy's thin screech, "Nancy's Jack he is, son of a poor gipsy body. He is a good grandson to poor Nancy, and good Mistress Mary keeps the roof over our heads, and the bit of land for the poultry."

Sir Peter frowned. He had given in unwillingly to his sister in the matter of the cottage for Nancy, and her guardianship of this parish child. But from what he had heard from Richards, this boy was growing into a regular young thief, heading straight for vagabondage and the House of Correction.

"You look too strong to be wasting your time idling, when honest work waits!" he said sternly.

"Where does it wait, your honour?" inquired Jack innocently.

Sir Peter fell into the trap.

"In Mr. Strong's mill," he answered.

Jack gave a laugh of sheer joyous merriment.

"Your honour doesn't send this young master to Mr. Strong's mill to sweat for thirteen hours behind locked doors, to keep him from wasting his time on pony-back!"

The sheer insolence of the blunt speech, and the roguish shining eyes of the boy who made it, took away Sir Peter's power of immediate retort. No wonder Richards had declared angrily that Nancy's Jack mocked at the sun, moon and stars, as if all heaven and hell belonged to him.

At any rate, Sir Peter, catching Lord Rawby's eye, decided to send off the boys with a servant safe from further harm.

"Good-bye, Nancy's Jack," said Malcolm, with a genuine graciousness, as he pulled up his reins, "and good thanks."

Jack might have answered, but the unexpected appearance of Mr. Strong with his manager and the parish overseer, turned his thoughts, and he looked wildly round for Kitty.

Kitty must not be driven back to the mill. He must save her at any cost, and already she was clutching desperately at his arm.

"Shall we run?" she breathed. "I can run twenty miles thoo knows."

"Aye," agreed Jack.

But of what avail to run when the overseer had spied the workhouse uniform, and the manager was on horseback?

"So," he laughed, "here is Kitty, our mill pepper-pot."

Kitty set up a shriek as he lifted her with a strong fling to his saddle. Kitty was an expert at kicking and yelling, and she used all her powers; but struggle as she might, she had become a secure captive to industrial expansion and the glory of Great Britain. Foolish Kitty, to think that her slight body and passionate will could make any impression on the mighty walls of authority which bounded her in.

But at least Kitty's screams were heard by the crowd, and their hearts were stirred at sight of Adam Strong talking so eagerly to the mine-owners.

For Adam Strong would stand by the owners, and the owners would stand by him, and the people, now muttering and looking into one another's eyes, knew that while neither colliers, weavers nor spinners might combine except under terrible penalty, the masters combined, by a nod, a wink, or a chat in a smoking room, and fell under no law. The masters could ride to London in a coach-and-six to get what they willed from Parliament. The masters could send to the House whom they would to put their case and bring down penalty on those who opposed them. The masters might even get the great Habeas Corpus Act suspended, so as to break the saviours of the people and dumb them in obscurity behind prison walls.

So, while Kitty screamed in vain, and Joe Tempest picked up one dead grandson and his daughter picked up the other, the men on horseback spoke together eagerly, and the crowd guessed what they were saying.

But Jack, deciding that he had not yet done all he might, took his chance as the gentlemen made a motion to separate, and went up to Sir Peter. For Kitty's sake he must lower his pride to ask a favour.

"Please your honour," he said respectfully, "I saved your son from a broken head. Can't you save Kitty from going back to the mill? Give her to Nancy Fodderty and me!"

"Come, Mason!" said Lord Rawby, looking at him meaningly, "we have work to do."

"Let go my bridle, boy!" said Sir Peter impatiently.

"Not till you give Kitty to Nancy and me," said Jack, stubbornly.

"Sir Peter," exclaimed the overseer, "I pray you to remember that authority must be maintained."

But Jack held on and took another line.

"You killed my father, sir. You had him flogged to death——"

"Come, boy," he said uncomfortably, for he preferred, if he could, to shirk the disagreeable, "I want no fairy tales."

"Fairy tales!" Jack's eyes glowed. "Your honour will know that they pressed my father?"

"Your father?" The words broke from him. Whose were those eyes looking him through and through with such burning reproach?

"Aye, my father!" said Jack, standing to his full height. "My father died for the people, and I—shall live for the people until I die!"

And still Sir Peter gazed, and gripped his reins.

Nancy came closer, thinking she might help, for anything her Jack wanted, Jack must have.

"I tell you I know nothing about your father!" burst out Sir Peter with an impotent anger. "Unhand my rein, or——" he raised his whip threateningly.

Jack laughed out.

"Strike John Wolfson's son—if it so please your honour!"

Sir Peter dropped his whip. His hand crossed his eyes.

"Aye, your honour," cried Nancy. "Poor Madge's baby, whom mad Nancy saved from the river!"

Sir Peter was absorbed in the changing expression in the boy's eyes.

The whimsical expression of his girl-wife as she allowed him to kiss her lips. The look she gave him when he broke to her the lie, if it was a lie, that she was not his wife; and now—that fiery look of passion, as Madge besought him to save John Wolfson from the press-gang before——

Sir Peter cursed inwardly that the buried past should rise up in the eyes of Nancy's Jack, vivid, tempestuous, unforgettable. Furious with life rather than with himself, he wrenched his bridle away and galloped off.

Nancy sent after him her mocking "Ha! ha! ha!" but what availed a woman's mockery?

Thus Jack pleaded for his playmate in vain, and Kitty, yielding despairingly to overwhelming force, was taken off in triumph to the mill, for on this Saturday there were still some long hours to run.

IV

LADY MASON PROTESTS

A VERY choice evening had been arranged at the Manor House on this evening. The entertainment was to consist of classic and modern music, recitation, song and, perchance, dancing.

Sir Peter, landowner, mine-owner, and Member of Parliament as he was, had a deep ambition to lead in the artistic and intellectual life of his day. Cultured to the borderline of over-refinement, he was recognised as an acquisition in any circle in which he found himself, by his appreciation of pure style, whether in literature, furniture or china, by his skill in music, and the wonder of his voice.

He had set aside this morning for a final practice, but now, fresh from the colliery excitement, he locked his study door and, flinging himself down, buried his face in his hands.

But even closed eyes could not blot out the vision of his son. Jack had not died. He was alive to-day—wild, strong, eager.

Sir Peter groaned at the trick fortune had played him, and as he rocked himself to and fro, struggling after composure, he was blinded by that-which-might-have-been, had he been true to his first love.

At least beautiful Madge, with her brown eyes and her sensitive mouth, would have been a loyal and admiring wife. Capable of education and culture, she would have grown in ability—a real helpmate and homemaker. For the baronet, in spite of the Manor House and Grosvenor Square, possessed no home. If Madge had remained by his side he would have been spared the wearing tragedy of companionship with a woman who was no woman, but merely a bundle of selfish nerves and vampire influence.

It was Anne who had hounded him on to enclosure; Anne who had nerved him to his many enterprises in industry; Anne who had brought him to his present success. Without her spurring he now knew that he would have been contented with a far less ambitious life. And yet, even as his thoughts

hardened towards Anne, he knew he was unjust. Now and again he had glimpses of a strange Anne, outside his reckoning. But that Anne really loved him—no—that notion was absurd. But she loved—adored Malcolm—yes—so much he must admit.

And now the earthquake had opened under his home. To acknowledge Jack as his son would be impossible now, without humiliating his wife and disinheriting Malcolm from the title and the entail—and even Catherine, and her mother's ambitions for her, must be considered.

The casual remark he had once heard as to marriages at Gretna Green not being legal had acted as a salve to his conscience, but he knew, even though he refused to verify his knowledge, that he was sheltering behind a dream. And now, to his consternation, he was discovering within him a passionate longing after Madge's son which terrified him.

He flung himself up and tried to practise. Sir Peter was lonely even in his art; for Anne only encouraged his skill because it was the correct thing for a gentleman to affect musical culture, and it lured the very great of the district to the Manor House.

But at a sharp knock he threw down his fiddle and sprang to the door, aware that he was destined to undergo one of his wife's nervous tirades.

"So, Peter," she exclaimed, "the whole district in commotion, and your only son brutally attacked by ruffians, and you can practise your fiddle, without even coming to inquire how I am?"

After two hours under the hands of her woman, Lady Mason was, even at this hour, fair to look upon, if artificial creams and powders and the hair-dressing art can make a woman fair.

"I am sorry, Anne," he said peaceably, "but in truth I have much to think over, for this explosion may mean great loss to us."

"And I hope it will mean loss to others!" she said fiercely. "Malcolm tells me of the anger of these lower orders whom we take the trouble to employ. They richly deserve to be locked out of the pit. And Peter"—and her voice rose indignantly—"how came you to allow a sensitive boy like Malcolm to see those dead children? What is the use of my sheltering him so anxiously when you undo it all in an hour by so monstrous a sight?"

"Again I am sorry," he admitted; "but the boys went to the pit against my leave. In my father's day they would each have received a sound flogging for their disobedience," and he tried to turn off the matter with a laugh.

"Peter—how can you laugh?" she cried. "Any woman can see what this means, and my nerves will not stand it. I am thankful to hear that the dragoons are in readiness to keep the rabble down, but meanwhile I want you to take me right away to Bath."

"But my dear Anne——"

"Pray do not 'dear Anne' me!" she said petulantly. "I slept but seven hours last night, and was awakened by the clattering of your horses' hoofs. I wish to go on Monday."

"But I fear Lord Rawby may want me in consultation——"

"I see, Peter! You do not wish to go with me?"

Then Peter gave in to her. Not wholly because of her petulance, but because he suddenly craved to escape the torture of a boy's eyes.

Anne was surprised at his easy acquiescence, and she rewarded him by her most gracious and amiable manner, and consulted him as to her packing, and what servants they would require, and where they should stay, so that she might take the cure most easily.

V

SILVER BUCKLES AND ROSES

Now Adam Strong was shrewd enough never to go against public opinion unless it served his purpose so to do. It had annoyed him to see the public capture of his small employee, and he gave a sharp hint that no further punishment was to fall on the child if she submitted to rule.

In a sense, therefore, Kitty triumphed, for at least she had gained glorious hours of freedom and had won Nancy's Jack as her staunch champion. She was more of a heroine than ever amongst the children, and even the shades of the workhouse did not seem quite so terrible now that she could romance over so wild an adventure. As she squatted by Old Billy, she told of all she had seen, and he capped her tale by stories of his own, of days still worse for the miners than in 1805.

When Kitty, too weary to sleep, tossed restlessly on her

hard sack of straw, she imagined the day when beautiful Jack would dress her like a lady with silver buckles on her shoes, and give her real roses to smell every day, while her hair trailed to the hem of her silken gown.

But in Bishop's End the full extent of the disaster was at last known. Twenty men, women and boys had been killed and a dozen seriously injured.

The horror of the position was that there would be no inquiry, and no inquest. The dead would be buried, the injured would pull through as best they might, and there the incident would end.

No wonder that voices rose strong and bitter. Many walked over from Bracken Fell on that Saturday evening to hear the news, to sympathise and to rave. Robbie Graham was amongst them, eager to know the worst and to join in discussion.

Having been to the Manor House to look up some of his old fellow-servants, he had heard the ominous report that messengers had been sent at the gallop to Oldcastle. This news could have but one meaning. The dragoons had been warned to be in readiness.

Yet when Robbie reported, he could make no effect upon the excited crowd. Grievance after grievance was bewailed to add to the exasperation and agony of the day's disaster, and it was Joe Tempest who voiced the notion that they should all refuse to go back to the pit until they received the signatures of the masters promising to sink an upcast shaft and redress their list of wrongs.

"There is music at the Manor House to-night!" called Jack. "They are fiddling and singing. I have looked in at the window."

The boy's indignant tone put a finishing touch to their resolution.

"Then by my two dead grandsons, we will go and stop their music," shouted Tempest.

Clamorous applause greeted the idea, and though at first the whole crowd wished to rush off, Robbie persuaded them to appoint a dozen of their number as a deputation, so that they might arrive in good order with their grievances and claims properly written out.

"'Tis John Wolfson, this lad's murdered father, you need to-night," said Robbie with anxious regret.

"And Harry Vipond!" shouted an older man. "God send him back to our help."

So the deputation was chosen, and Jack, determined to see and to hear all, walked in the darkness behind them as they made for the Manor House.

VI

THE VOICE IN THE GARDEN

Sir Peter had received a snub from his wife when he suggested that it might be suitable to put off the guests in view of the pit disaster.

"But how could we possibly send round to them all?" she asked. "And after the disgraceful way the villagers have behaved, they deserve no consideration whatever; besides—think of the duchess—it would be unpardonable to put off the duchess."

The advent of a real Scottish duchess to the gathering was certainly a fact of moment, and the worried baronet again let his wife take her way.

Now the walking speed of the deputation was too slow for Jack. For long he had been ambitious to see for himself the wonders of the Manor House. Therefore he ran on, climbed a wall, and making his way through the moonlit shrubbery he squatted down in the shadow of a statue of Ceres the all-bountiful mother.

The dancers and company generally were feeling the heat of the *salon*, and some of the windows were wide open to the terrace; so that Jack was able to drink in the wonders of the dresses, the uniforms, the furniture, pictures, jewels and the shine of the massed candles. From where he crouched, he could see a marvellous instrument at which a musician was seated, and presently Sir Peter himself stood up to oblige the company with a song.

"Cherry ripe! Cherry ripe! Ripe I cry,
Full and fair ones, come and buy—"

Jack's lips moved with those of the singer. How often he had sung that song to his village admirers! And as the song ceased and the applause subsided, the audience became aware

of an echo from the garden—the wonder of some exquisite treble trilling out the old air to the night.

Malcolm, clothed in black velvet and lace, silk stockings and buckled shoes, sprang out to the terrace, and the company, ever excited over any new thrill, gathered at the open window.

"Cherry ripe! Come and buy." So the last challenge rang out, and Lord Rawby, genial with wine and good food, called to the mysterious singer to come out of hiding.

But Jack was not to be caught so easily, and he stood dumb.

"Come!" shouted Lord Rawby. "A shilling for a song!"

"Two shillings for a Scotch song," called the young duchess merrily.

"Two shillings, Her Grace the Duchess offers," cried Lord Rawby. "A Scotch song let it be!"

Jack was used to singing for pence, and two shillings was a temptation. Still he hesitated proudly, until an idea came to him. These great people should give him two shillings to hear the ploughman's song which a pedlar had sung one night at the "Fur and Feathers." Jack had written down the words and the tune was in his head for evermore.

There was a moment's pause of wonder as to whether this boy or woman would close with the bargain. They were not disappointed.

Never surely did nightingale cry so passionately to heaven as did this hidden singer. The sheer compelling beauty of the performance carried the audience completely.

"For a' that, and a' that,
Our toil's obscure for a' that:
The rank is but the guinea stamp:
The man's the gowd for a' that!

"Then let us pray that come it may,
As come it will for a' that:
When sense and worth o'er a' the earth
May bear the gree, and a' that.

"For a' that, and a' that,
It's coming yet for a' that,
That man to man, the warld o'er
Shall brithers be for a' that."

And twelve heavy-footed men coming up the drive, paused to listen to the triumphant prophecy of God's future.

"Nancy's Jack," said Tempest. "If only the lad were a dozen years older!"

And in low gruff tones they spoke together. Their task grew heavier as they neared the house. It would have been easier to go at a mad gallop with stones in their hands, than to face these educated masters with that ill-written and ill-spelled document which Joe was clutching.

But in the *salon* Lady Mason caught something of the trend of the strange song, and she came forward protestingly as the guests volleyed out their applause.

"You will have fever, standing out in the night air listening to such folly," she said in her sweetest and most persuasive manner.

But the young duchess clapped her hands.

"'Tis a song of Robbie Burns!" she cried eagerly. "'Tis said his songs will live so long as Scottish hearts beat—from pole to equator."

Jack had certainly been lucky in his audience, and anxiety to see him increased.

"An English song now," called a loud voice. "Five shillings and a mug of ale!"

Jack broke into a peal of merry laughter. The speaker was Adam Strong, and he was offering more than half a week's wages for a song.

It was just at this moment that Sir Peter was called aside. It appeared that some colliers from Bishop's End wished to see him.

Sir Peter needed but to glance at Lord Rawby with an uplifted forehead, and the two were in deep consultation. All Lord Rawby's affability vanished. He was at grips with life and money-making, stern, resolute and anxious to keep Sir Peter up to scratch.

"What strength are they?" he asked sharply.

"About a dozen, but my man thinks there is a pretty big mob keeping back at the drive gate. I have sent along to inspect."

A sound of singing made them turn. Lord Rawby gave a laugh.

"Well, the fellows can wait until I have heard this mysterious singer. He may be worth catching to train in London."

Sir Peter looked back into the *salon*, and was staggered at

seeing a boy in rough clothes, tumbled hair and large brown eyes standing at his ease by the piano, while the accompanist was striking some opening chords and the gay company were looking on highly entertained. His son Malcolm was standing close to the singer, wholly absorbed, fair and slight, and a complete contrast to the stalwart bronzed young singer. But it was the wording of the song and the well-known melody that sent Sir Peter back against a heavy curtain which fell in folds about him.

" ' Oh gay is the garland, and fresh are the roses
I've culled from the garden to bind in my brow.
Oh, don't deceive me ; oh, never leave me !
How could you use a poor maiden so ? '
" Thus sang the poor maiden, her sorrows beguiling,
Thus sang the poor maiden in the valley below :
' Oh, don't deceive me ; oh, never leave me !
How could you use a poor maiden so ? ' "

A cataract of hand-clapping greeted the boy as he wailed out the maiden's tragedy. Jack smiled and bowed, as though well used to an audience.

" He is the gipsy boy whom Nancy Fodderty has brought up," said Adam Strong in a disparaging aside, regretting his offer.

But Jack heard, and flushed, and his mocking eyes flashed.

" Nay, Mr. Strong, I am no gipsy," he said proudly. " I am John Wolfson's son ! "

Strong stood back a pace. He remembered that rebel weaver of twelve years ago, who had fought against enclosure and fought against his mill. But surely—had he been mistaken that his wife and son had been drowned ?

Lady Mason also heard the boy's declaration. She steadied herself admirably.

" I don't care who he is," said the duchess, laughing. " But he has earned well my shillings, and you, sir, may hand over your crown, and the company will thank you for a rare entertainment."

Mr. Strong, gratified at being in such select company, could not but bow and smile and put his hand in his pocket.

Jack stood quiet—too quiet, if the company had but known. He accepted the duchess's shillings, and offered her a bent knee and a winning smile.

" By Gad ! " whispered Lord Rawby to Sir Peter, " yonder lad sings as though he had stolen your voice, and he smiles as though you had begotten his smile ! "

His jocosity was interrupted, for Lady Mason wished for a word with her husband, and he drew back.

" Peter ! Who is that boy ? "

" You have heard," he said lightly.

" Aye, I have heard ! "

But Adam Strong was thrusting out his crown to Jack even as the boy leaped backwards and clenched his hands.

" John Wolfson's son touches no traitor gold ! " he said in his clear voice, so that all might hear. " He touches no money won in the mill by flogging little children. Give yon crown to Kitty Vipond, sir, when her back is healed, but offer it not to John Wolfson's son ! " For a moment he waited, and man and boy stared into one another's angry eyes. Then Jack turned, made a sweeping bow to the company and darted from the window.

The company laughed somewhat nervously, though at heart they thoroughly enjoyed the mill-owner's chagrin ; but their hostess swiftly covered the situation by making a peremptory motion to the orchestra.

A merry dance was instantly struck up, eager partners sought one another, and the older folk fell to gossip.

VII

IN THE GUN ROOM

As the deputation of colliers passed to the gun room they heard the merry music, and the sound strengthened their nerves.

They mustered awkwardly enough, and stood in a group, caps in their hands, while a young unofficial member followed them closely.

Sir Peter entered from another door, and the men noticed that Lord Rawby accompanied him. An unofficial young member of the master class also stood behind in velvet and lace, to hear what occurred.

Sir Peter was in no condition to deal coolly with the situation, for he was quivering with conflicting emotions.

Jack's fearless passion had appealed to his father's heart,

yet the look he had seen in his wife's distraught eyes had shaken him profoundly. That bygone jealousy of Madge had not been killed after all.

"Well, my men?" he began with artificial cheerfulness, "let me hear at once what you have to say. 'Tis a strange hour to trouble one of your masters."

"Trouble comes at strange hours," shot out one of the men, but Tempest motioned him to hold his tongue.

"We have come, your honour," said Joe, speaking with controlled respect, "to ask for the upcast shaft which has been promised by your honour these five years, and we have set down a few grievances which we would like your honour to read."

Sir Peter took the grimy paper offered and glanced down it. More than one noticed his beautiful white hands and shapely nails.

"Well?" and he frowned at Tempest; "go on!"

"We have come to ask you to sign it, sir," said Tempest, irritated by the master's manner. "We have set ourselves that we won't go back to t' pit till we have your honour's word that it shall be made safe, and the men treated fair."

"You mean that, then, as a threat?" asked Sir Peter.

Tempest paused. He noted that Lord Rawby was on the alert, and he now wondered whether they would not have been wiser to have delayed this deputation until Lord Rawby had returned to his castle. Sir Peter alone might have served them better. But they were here now and things could not well be worse, and it flashed into Tempest's soul that he was not going to be brow-beaten by any noble lord.

"Well, sir, if it is a threat to ask that murder shall stop—and that men and women of flesh and blood shall be given a chance—well——"

"Beware—this is a damned cover for rank sedition," murmured Lord Rawby. The fact that the deputation could not hear raised their suspicions.

"Think on, your honour, that we colliers have worked from generation to generation under threat of death—in the masters' hell."

"Aye," broke in another, "and where's the common humanity of t' masters, when they can crowd their drives with chariots and horses and servants, and their rooms

with dancers, while our dead lie in their grave-clothes unburied ? "

Sir Peter flushed. After all he had instinctively doubted the good taste of the festivity. The accusation, inasmuch as it was reasonable, cut the deeper and roused a worried sense of annoyance, first against Anne, and then against the rough-tongued accuser.

" I am perfectly willing to hear what you have to say, so long as you can keep civil tongues in your heads," he answered proudly. " But let me remind you that you are all bound by your yearly bond, and the man who breaks may find himself in Oldcastle Jail."

An angry growl burst from the men, but Tempest raised his hand.

" And what of the dead who have broken the yearly bond ? " demanded Tempest. " Will your honours sue Death for keeping 'em safe from Oldcastle Jail ? "

" Are you such confounded fools that you don't know that this combination is illegal ? " asked Lord Rawby.

" A threat ! A threat ! " shouted a collier, irritated that the leader did not go faster.

Tempest was aware that he had a difficult task ; for the exasperated colliers behind him were ignorant, fickle and unreasonable, and the masters in front were clever, educated, and all-powerful.

" If your honours will but hear me ! " he said, nerving himself strenuously. " This bond you speak of is a bond of gold to the masters and a bond of slavery to the colliers. Amongst yourselves you bind us to work or to stand unemployed at your pit-head, and offer us jail when, starving, we seek work at another pit. You can leave us, workless, in misery ; but we may not leave you. You can fine us, lower our pay, cheat us at the weighing, and your paymaster can keep his shop and force us to buy from him at his own price. If we vex you, or if we speak together of our lot you can put the law on us—and turn us out of our homes if we refuse to carry our very children on our backs to work in your pits. And at the end—the parish ! It is all down on yon paper, your honour, and in God's name, sir, if there is a God—give a fair thought to what we suffer, and every collier in Bishop's End will bless you and forgive you for his dead."

Lord Rawby's eyes flashed.

"Forgive! This dirty rabble talks so—to gentlemen?"

"Dust to dust, my lord!" shouted Tempest. "One day we shall crumble to dust, and none will then tell whether we died black with the coal dust on us or white with your soaps and your scents!"

It was surely unfortunate that they were interrupted by a burst of merry laughter as a bevy of gay dancers disported themselves under the moonlight.

"Five years ago since your honour promised us yon shaft—and twenty men and lads might have been alive to-day if your honour had kept his word," called a member.

"It used to be said a gentleman's word was his bond!" mocked another.

"There are no gentlemen to-day—only slave owners!" insisted another.

Now, though Jack was listening, his eyes were roving round the room. He wanted to see all he could, so that he might tell fairy tales to Nancy, and perhaps to Kitty one day, when she was old enough to be his wife.

Crushed in as he was against a handsome oak chest, he could not help seeing a small purple leather case. By its side was a card written clearly: "To Catherine, with many happy returns of her birthday."

So Miss Catherine was going to have a birthday; and Jack's mind became consumed with curiosity to know what kind of a present a little miss might have whose hair was allowed to grow as long as she liked. There could be no harm in opening the case to see.

He slipped it off the desk, opened it, and took out an exquisite pair of silver and diamond buckles. Instantly his mind flew to Kitty. How Kitty longed for silver shoe-buckles. He turned them over and over in his hand, examining them carefully, so that he might tell Kitty about them. But in doing so he dropped them, and, terrified lest he should be caught in mischief, he dared not stoop to pick them up, but pushed them with his foot under the desk. Then, snapping the case, he returned it to its place.

But, on turning his flushed face to listen to Tempest's argument, he noticed his prime enemy, the keeper, Richards, leaning up against a window staring at him.

But at this instant an apparition in velvet and lace startled both masters and colliers.

Malcolm laid a hand on his father's arm.

"Sir," he pleaded earnestly, "if you, in truth, promised these poor men something—a Mason never breaks his word—either to man or woman."

The boy spoke softly, but in the dead silence the words were plain.

"Malcolm!" exclaimed Sir Peter. "What are you doing here? Go this instant. This is no business of yours!"

"Nay, Sir Peter," cried Tempest, "remember that what you do this night is the young master's business, for the sins of the fathers will bind the children—from generation to generation!"

But an ominous sound swept all attention from Malcolm. Clearly the crowd at the gate was growing impatient, and some of the gorgeous equipages driving away from the party had been received with groans and hisses, and the coachmen, in their anxiety, had slashed with their whips—and lashes across the face sting.

Sir Peter glanced at Lord Rawby, and to his surprise he read great satisfaction in his expression.

"Exactly what we wanted!" he whispered. "I did not tell you that I have the constable, supported by dragoons in full readiness. Too risky to have the county gathered here without protection."

But Tempest sprang forward.

"May I tell them, sir, that the masters will sign?"

"You can tell them they may go to hell!" stormed Lord Rawby.

It was enough. Tempest, eager to exercise authority over his misguided comrades, rushed off, followed by the rest of the deputation.

By the time they had reached the garden, a wild, partly drunken mob had arrived, shouting and threatening.

In the *salon* utter consternation prevailed until Lord Rawby hurried in.

"Keep quiet—all of you—the dragoons are upon them. Listen!"

And in the *salon* they listened. Shouts. Shots. Cries.

"Oh, sir!" cried Malcolm, clinging to his father. "Save them! Save the poor men from the soldiers!"

"You don't understand, my boy," said his father kindly. "These people are not poor men; they are low, turbulent

fellows, who will never learn to be humble and contented with the lot offered to them in this great nation of ours, until we have convinced them as to who is master."

But Malcolm, anxious and miserable, shook his head doubtfully, and passed out to the verandah. The noise was certainly lessening. Stray shouts and crashings through the wood sounded more distantly. Presently the guests drove off excitedly, amidst the clattering of dragoons. Malcolm hid himself until at last all was still. But no! Far up, as it seemed from the sky, a voice rang out with passionate triumph:

"For a' that, and a' that,
It's coming yet for a' that,
That man to man, the warld o'er,
Shall brithers be, for a' that."

The keeper, Richards, also heard the singing and smiled grimly.

"Ah, my pretty songbird," he muttered, "at last I know how to break that pipe of yours. You have given me the slip many a time, but I have you tight at last."

VIII

OVER THE PORRIDGE

JACK and Nancy talked long into the night. The horror of what had happened at the pit, together with the amazing action of the dragoons in capturing the leaders, had forced the boy's growth by years.

Jack's constant intercourse with the downtrodden workers had not left him innocent of evil, brutality and stronger vices from which men and women, treated as beasts, find is difficult to escape. But this day's work had opened up a world of hideous oppression, which made real all the tales he had ever heard.

"Granny," he said, as he piled up the logs, "I shall write to Mistress Mary and tell her everything."

Nancy nodded, as she stirred round the porridge stick in preparation for an extra supper.

"And granny," he continued, "I saw right into the Manor House, and it was all fairyland—real! Oh—it was so beautiful—as fine as something Mr. Dolling once taught me."

"Aye?" she inquired. "Master Dolling is a good man, and mayhap the world would be better if there were more like him and less like the likes of me!"

"Nay, granny," said the boy affectionately; "but Mr. Dolling taught me this: 'Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to perceive the things God has prepared for them that love Him.' Yon was what the Manor House was like. Are the folks that I saw last night all so good that God gives them such things?"

Nancy splashed some porridge into Jack's basin and then into her own before she replied.

> "God made the poor to toil and slave
> To buy themselves an early grave.
> God made the rich to skin the poor,
> To clothe themselves for evermore!"

Jack gave her one of his radiant comical smiles.

"No—no, granny. He didn't! Thoo knows He didn't." And he passed Nancy the jug of milk.

"Jack," said Nancy thoughtfully, "I wish thy father was here to see after tha! He was good. He read his Bible. He prayed. He never told lies—nor thieved. Poor mad Nancy isn't fit to be granny to John Wolfson's son!"

"As if I wanted any other granny," said the boy loyally.

"Aye, but it worrits me that thoo should be out and about with such rough folk; seeing and hearing what thoo has no business to see and hear, and singing in the village, and in the beer shop and such like. I'se feared thy soul will go black, Jack. Black, like mad Nancy's. And I want John Wolfson's son to be white and clear, like a fell beck, to help to wash out a dirty world."

"But granny," said Jack comfortingly, "Mr. Dolling teaches me the Bible, and thoo knows I say 'Our Father' every night."

"Aye," admitted Nancy, "'Our Father.' It's not what I could pray myself, so long as there is folk that can grab all t' Father's world from t' rest of His childer, and Him not able, seemingly, to stop 'em. But don't thee take no notice of what I say, Jack. I is only mad Nancy, and my soul is black!"

"Why is thy soul black, granny?"

"Because I once hated a man, and hate turns folks' souls black as coal."

"Does it?" queried Jack. "And don't you hate him now?"

Nancy laid down her porridge spoon and sat with a curious distraught look on her face, which Jack was accustomed to see.

"Folk can't hate the dead—for there's nothing to hate—but all that belongs to him I hate—hate—and that's why thy Granny's soul keeps black."

"But what did he do—so bad?" asked Jack.

"He killed my lover—he blinded him and stabbed him, and I found him at the Old Quarry and—Ha! ha! ha!" Nancy waved her arms wildly and then sank them limply.

Jack laid a hand on her knee and exercised his brain to change the awkward topic.

"Granny," he said cheerfully, "in the gun room, while the colliers were talking to the masters, I saw a pair of shoe-buckles with twelve diamonds on each. They were a present for Miss Catherine. Why can't Kitty have silver buckles with diamonds?"

"Kitty wasn't born with a silver spoon in her mouth."

"But granny—who chooses which babies shall have the spoons?" Then, as Nancy shook her head, he added, "Kitty is going to be my wife some day, and grow her hair as long as she likes, and I am going to give her a pair of silver buckles, and she shall have real roses every day!"

Then Jack, yawning and tired out, went off to bed, to sleep the dreamless sleep of youth.

It was on the following morning that Richards went up to the Manor House and asked to see Lady Mason.

He was excited enough, and had decided that it would be better to go to his lady than to attempt to get his master to move against the irritating young scoundrel who seemed to take an impish delight in aggravating him.

He had been disappointed in discovering that the buckles had not been stolen, but the case was empty, and that was enough for his purpose.

"My lady," he said deferentially, "Sir Peter left this case in the gun room last night. I thought it might be an accident, so I have brought it," and he handed her the leather case and the birthday card.

"Why, thank you, Richards," said Lady Mason indifferently. "Sir Peter has so much to think of that he grows absent-minded. My present to Miss Catherine for her birthday. We must take it to Bath," and she snapped open the case.

"Why—it is empty!" she gasped.

"Empty?" exclaimed Richards, all amazed. "Ah—then—My God! That sly young dog!"

"What can you mean?" asked she reprovingly.

"Beg pardon, my lady, but—aye—Nancy's Jack! The biggest young thief in the district; only somehow Sir Peter will never let me bring him to book. I can swear that I saw him with that case in his hand.

"But when?" she asked, no longer indifferent, but excellently self-controlled.

"Last night, my lady, while the colliers were giving tongue to their masters. I saw him take up the case—I saw the buckles in his hand—for he is curious as any fox—then I saw him put the case down, but I never dreamed——" He broke off as words failed him.

"And this means?"

"A felony, my lady. Hanging! if the court does its duty. As clear a case as any jury could wish," said Richards breathlessly. "He must be arrested and searched. Shall I go at once to Sir Peter, my lady?"

"Pray do not trouble Sir Peter with this tiresome business," said Lady Mason quietly. "If we are to get off early to-morrow, he will not have a moment to spare. But inform the constable—let him proceed——"

"Yes, my lady," said Richards, preparing to go like a hound unleashed.

"But Richards—as the buckles were, in fact, my present to Miss Catherine, you can depend upon me for—for anything that is required."

"Very good, my lady," said the man. He understood the implied reward.

"You are certain—of—the evidence?"

"I can swear to enough to set the young rascal dancing at the rope end."

"Don't!" exclaimed Lady Mason sharply.

"Beg pardon, my lady. A keeper gets rough when he has the folk to deal with who come my way."

After Richards had bowed himself out Lady Mason sat very still, thinking hard.

There was a moment when she leaped up and laid her hand on a silver bell. Then she drew back.

IX

A LETTER TO MISTRESS MARY

It was a big task for Jack to write a letter, and usually he took his effort to Mr. Dolling, to make sure that all was correct. So, having taken pains to cut his quill with a very clumsy penknife, he began.

"My Honoured Mistress Mary,—I take up my pen to tell you how bad things are round here. The pit exploaded yesterday and 12 men and boys are ded. Joe Tempests twins are ded, they were seven and the worst is the solgers have taken away a many men and poor Joe Tempest and it was dredful with musick and dancing in the manner house and I sang for the ladies and gentelmen and a beautiful queen gave me two shillings but I would not take a crown from mister Strong and the solgers rode into the folks when they came to stop the musick wen 12 men and boys were lying ded and no coffins reddy yet.

"So Honoured Mistress Mary, the poor men the solgers took will be put in jail or sent over sea my granny says even God doesn' know wat will hapen but mister Dolling says God knows everything so I rite these few lines for if you could stop the justices from sending the men to jail everybody would give you grateful thanks and blessings and at the manner house I saw lovely things and I wanted to steel them all to give to Kitty she is the lass I am going to marry only my granny says that steeling gives lads black souls and she wants John Wolfson's son to have a wite soul but it is verry hard not to steel things wen Kitty wants them and now I must stop for my granny wants me to go to read the Bible with mister Dolling to get my soul wite.

"your humble and obedient little servant,

"Jack."

X

A VISITOR FOR MR. DOLLING

William Dolling, the old Nonconformist "ranter," kept himself in independence at Bracken Fell by cobbling the shoes and clogs of the district.

On Sunday he turned into a superintendent of a Sunday School for a score or so of children, whom he taught in an old

shed behind the shop, and on fine days he lifted up his voice in prayer and song and preaching under what became known as "Dolling's Tree."

Whether he had an audience or not did not seriously trouble him. The Lord, he affirmed, had given him the message, and that was sufficient.

On this Sunday, as he was reading his Bible, his doorway was shadowed, and he pulled his spectacles down his nose to see better.

"The cobbler's shop is the same then, Master Dolling!" said a gruff voice.

"Why—it's not—not Harry Vipond come home?"

Dolling leaped up, and gripping the heavily bearded man by the hand, he wrung it as though he could not stop.

"Aye, it's Harry right enough!" and the visitor gave a big laugh. "A good job his muscles are fit, when such as thee gets a grip!"

But Dolling stood back and raised his hand.

"The Lord be praised!" he said solemnly.

Vipond sank down on a bench, and suddenly a look of melancholy governed his countenance.

"It's the same old back parlour, Master Dolling," and there was a weary affection in his voice. "I've tramped it from Liverpool to Bracken Fell, but I'm near as lost as when I was in Australia."

"Aye—it has changed—has Bracken Fell," admitted the shoemaker.

"My father's strip of land has gone and the old pond—and the hazel copse and—will it be Adam Strong who has built all them cattle sheds for his workpeople?"

"Aye! Mr. Strong bought a rare lot of land when the folk had to let it go, because they couldn't fence. He has t' cottages and t' folk right enough."

"Aye." Vipond paused, as though he had difficulty in getting something out. "And my wife, Master Dolling?"

"She—died," admitted he sympathetically.

Vipond clenched his hands, not angrily, but as though in torturing pain.

"Aye—I knew she had died—when I got no letter. Did the parish bury her?"

"Aye," said Dolling reluctantly.

Vipond pulled off his belt.

"It is heavy with gold—I worked two years out yonder after I got my release. But now—what is a belt of gold when Sally is gone, eh?"

"A deal of good, Harry, lad!" cried Dolling excitedly, "when thy own lass cries her eyes out in Strong's mill or in t' workhouse!"

"What—Sally had a child?" Vipond sprang up.

"Kitty, they call her," pursued the cobbler. "She comes past in a cart every day with t' rest of t' parish apprentices. And whenever I spy yon cart I stop my work and pray God to bless 'em, poor childer! 'Tis said that Mr. Strong is building one o' these 'Prentice Houses to keep 'em more handy, but there's tales gets telt."

But Vipond was scarcely listening. His whole frame was quivering, and great tears trickled down his hard, leathery cheeks.

"Master Dolling, I'll come back to you, but just now I must be off to yon workhouse. Sally's lass! Kitty, did you say?"

But the door opened, and Jack burst in without ceremony. He had his fiddle in his hand, and he stood back at sight of the burly stranger.

"Yonder is Kitty's own father! What does ta think of that, Nancy's Jack?" cried Dolling. He had risen, and the tears were glittering in his eyes.

"What? My Kitty's father?" he stammered.

Dolling laughed at sight of Vipond's puzzled expression.

"We call this lad Nancy's Jack, Harry. Thoo'll remember Nancy Fodderty. She has been a good granny to Jack since she took him in from a starving gipsy woman."

"Master Dolling!" and the boy clasped his teacher's hand, "what would ta think if Jack was no gipsy's son, but John Wolfson's son?"

Dolling shook his head, unable to comprehend so wild a romance.

"Aye, but I is," shouted Jack. "Ask Robbie Graham. He was with my father when they flogged him to death on a warship. He sent a message to me. My father died for the people!" and he looked challengingly towards Vipond.

"And why do you call my Kitty, your Kitty?" asked Vipond, struck with the strength and open charm of this lad.

"Because Kitty and me are going to marry one day. We've promised, but——" Jack gave a leap and uttered a

wild whoop. "Kitty won't be a parish apprentice no more. You can buy her out, sir, and keep her, and stop them flogging her at t' mill till her frock sticks with the blood."

"They—did?" demanded Vipond.

"Aye!" and Jack nodded solemnly.

"I'll go right away to her," he said firmly.

"Oh—please! May I come, too?" pleaded Jack.

The returned wanderer was touched at the eagerness of his daughter's boy-lover, and nodded good-humouredly.

So Jack, asking Dolling to look over his letter to Mistress Mary, hurried off in a state of delirious excitement with Kitty's father.

It was not the fault of Jack's tongue if, before they ended that two-mile walk, Vipond did not know all there was to know, which might put him into touch with what was happening round his old home.

At the workhouse, the children were kept in the same quarters with the aged men and women. Derelicts, semi-imbeciles, persons with nauseous habits and worse tongues were the children's companions.

It was well that Kitty had "taken up" with Old Billy, a superior man, broken down and harmless, who had looked to spend his last days in his cottage with his bit of common right to keep him, until his children buried him.

Billy had his ideas and a very keen memory, but for the most part his desires centred round a longing for a mug of beer and the sight of a well-fed pig.

"Tell us tales, Old Billy," said the tired children, as they crouched about him in the glorious leisure of this particular Sunday.

A day was coming when religious sentiment was to exercise itself in seeing that these small slaves of industry had good "religious" instruction, but on this Sunday Old Billy was their welcomed teacher.

"Tell us about the maypole and how the children danced," said Kitty eagerly.

So Billy told of old Bracken Fell, of sport and leisure, and the reaping of the fields and the harvest home, and the gathering of the hay and the milking of the cows. He told of the cutting of the peat fuel, each man drying his own winter's store, and, as the children anticipated, Billy told of bacon and ham, and what his own pigs had once weighed,

and the children knew the weights, for they had heard them a hundred times. But Kitty raised her hand to persuade them not to interrupt the old man.

But suddenly authority, in the form of a stalwart woman whom the children called Biddy, entered the dreary room and called Kitty away.

Kitty wildly conjectured for what crime she was to be punished, and settled herself with sullen resolution, for one punishment more or less could not really matter.

But Biddy told her sharply to go and wash herself, do her hair, change her pinafore and put on shoes instead of clogs.

Kitty obeyed wonderingly, and made her face glow with the strong evil-smelling soap and the dirty rough towel. She smoothed down her hair, in a manner awful to behold, and longed that she might see herself as she had once seen herself, when her wonderful Jack brought her to that pool.

Now, ready for inspection, she was hurried along the stone passage towards a forbidding-looking office. Kitty knew that office by many unhappy associations.

The master of the workhouse was there and also a big stranger, and Kitty dropped a frightened curtsey, and then stood at attention with her hands behind her.

Now Harry Vipond was no fool, and he had soon taken stock of the master. A respectful courtesy and a couple of guineas had already done wonders. It was out of the master's power to give up a parish apprentice without orders, but against a Sunday outing there was no law.

"Kitty Vipond," said the master, not unkindly, "You are to go out for the day with your father."

"But—please sir—I haven't any father!" said the bewildered child, dropping another deprecating curtsey.

"Nay, nay, Kitty lass!" said the big stranger, not able to control himself, "but thoo has a father! Thy father is me!"

But Kitty turned in her amazement to the master.

"Oh, please sir—is it true? Is he—my real father?"

"True enough!" and he gave a big laugh. "Now sir, she must be back by nightfall, but to-morrow I will see what can be done, if in truth you want to take her off our hands?"

"There is nothing I want more!" And in Vipond's glance the master visioned more golden metal.

"Come lass," said her father, "I have left a lad outside

waiting of us. 'Jack,' he calls himself," and he watched her shrewdly.

"Oh—if Jack is there, sir, it must be all right!" and she put her hand confidingly in his.

If ever two children were in bliss, it was Jack and Kitty as they danced along by the side of this mighty protector, and when Vipond declared that they would go right back to Bracken Fell and have a big dinner at the "Fur and Feathers," there seemed no further earthly bliss to be desired.

"And afterwards," suggested Jack, "shall we go to the tree and hear Master Dolling give his message from the Lord?"

"Why surely, if that would please tha, lad!" said Vipond frankly surprised.

"They are coming in crowds—over from Bishop's End!" said Jack excitedly.

"Ah!" said Vipond.

XI

TWO SERMONS

In spite of the increasing population round the mill, the attendance at the church dwindled. Not that mere numbers mattered seriously, when the Manor House pew was still worthily filled, and the wives and daughters of thriving farmers used their church-going as an occasion for examining the latest fashions, and showing themselves off as being but little behind.

Handsome equipages still waited in the road, and servants lounged until their masters and mistresses had completed their devotions. But the old village crowd was no longer there.

Now Parson Lutterby was famous for his choice of a text, suitable to any public occasion, and the excitement of the day before set his admirers wondering what they would hear.

Therefore it came about that after the congregation had sung the Magnificat, and proclaimed that the Majesty on High was One who "put down the mighty from their seats and exalted the humble and meek," and had gabbled through the psalms, and whispered with one another through the lessons, they sat back for the expected thrill, secure that the parson would set all doubts at rest concerning the respective positions of the mighty and the meek.

Parson Lutterby was aware of the expectations of his congregation, and gave out his text with confidence.

"The great King Solomon hath written for our instruction the words of Holy Writ as followeth: 'A wise king scattereth the wicked, and bringeth the wheel over them.'"

The congregation rustled with contentment. The parson had not failed them; but as he was about to begin his discourse, he became uncomfortably aware of two keen eyes watching him.

Nancy Fodderty had broken all precedent and come to church.

Parson Lutterby was a tithe-owner, a justice, an overseer and a sportsman. Had any one delved to the depths of his shallow soul they would have discovered a kaleidoscopic mixture of emotions. Loyalty to the Protestant succession, hatred of the French, economy in the parish, and an indiscriminating belief in county society.

Lady Mason, in consideration of her nerves, had made the parson her almoner, and in twelve years the comparative independence of the poor had dwindled to an anxious endeavour to keep on the right side of the local powers in order that they might share in the local largess. A man, it was recognised, must think of his family, so beef-and-blanket, or, as the villagers more rudely expressed it, "back-and-belly" religion, held a sway against which the more independent beat in vain.

"A wise king scattereth the wicked, and bringeth the wheel over them!" So the parson rang out his text once more, taking care to avoid Nancy Fodderty's eye. It was only necessary to prove that the rioters were the wicked, and the wise king was the pseudonym for the employing class, to elaborate a telling discourse.

Landowners and farmers had suffered from the rough manners of the colliers, and their irradicable poaching propensities, and even the more sympathetic argued that during the boom years now passing away, they had received handsome pay, which they had squandered in beer and gambling and cock fighting.

The farmers, whose thoughts were apt to turn during church hours to plans for enlarged houses, handsome furniture, and the advancement of their children, were glad to feel that the Church was on the side of patriotic prices, and Adam

Strong, hoping to become high sheriff, let his mind wander concerning the price of yarns and new buildings, and the best site for a mansion with park and gardens. Lady Mason, with her thoughts on a duchess's only son as bridegroom to her daughter, would have been horrified had she known that Mr. Strong was calculating what fortune he must accumulate for his son in order that he might marry Miss Catherine.

"My friends," said the parson in his closing peroration, "it is the Lord Who hath set the rich man in his castle and the poor man at his gate. The rich man in his counting house and the poor man at his toil. Let those who resist their employers remember that they are resisting the ordinance of God, Who hath declared that only in the sweat of a man's brow shall man eat bread. Blessed be God, He knoweth how to order His own world, and woe betide any who shall seek to move against God!"

"Aye! Woe! Woe! Woe!" shrilled out Nancy, leaping to her feet.

The horrified congregation turned in consternation, but Nancy could say no more, for she was seized by two black-coated vergers and dragged from the church.

Harry Vipond, Jack and Kitty were passing on their way to the promised dinner, when, seeing Nancy struggling furiously with her captors, Jack rushed forward.

"Granny! Granny!" he said comfortingly, for he saw that she was seized with one of her mad excitements. Jack motioned with a strange authority to the vergers, and they turned doubtfully away, while the boy seated his granny on the old square tomb on which, years ago, she used to sit and beg.

Equipages began to move as yawning servants saw that the service was almost over.

"Granny," said Jack, "such wonderful news. Kitty's father has come home."

"Aye, Mistress Fodderty. You'll not have forgotten Harry Vipond, who beat you out a poker while you blew the bellows for him!"

Nancy put her hands to her head, seeking to gather her scattered wits.

"Harry Vipond! Who got himself sent overseas for the sake of the land won for the people by the Lady of Bracken Fell?"

But the congregation was coming out, a veritable church parade. Lord Rawby was there with his wife and son, so was the merry duchess, and other handsomely dressed ladies and gentlemen, who walked along the lich way to the lich-gate, or the corpse gate, as the common folk called it.

Jack, fearing another explosion from his granny, tried to induce her to move away, but Nancy was not to be held within bounds.

"Aye, gentlemen and ladies," she cried, as she dropped a series of mocking curtseys; "'tis a brave show ye make to the corpse gate, in the clothes digged from the pits by the men ye have sent to rot in Oldcastle Jail! Ha! ha! ha!"

"Peter!" exclaimed Anne wrathfully, "Get that woman removed."

"And where would Sir Peter's fine wife have been if poor Madge had not saved her from the river?" shrieked Nancy. "A coffin full of bones—Ha! ha! ha!"

Anne started, and flushed violently. She had hoped she had forgotten that incident. But the merry duchess saved an awkward situation as she advanced on the parson's arm.

"Why—yonder is my singer!" and she waved her fan towards Jack. "Thy voice, lad, is worth ten sermons! Your pardon, Mr. Lutterby!" and she smiled nonsensically towards her squire.

To be made fun of by a duchess was uttermost glory to a country parson, and he promptly complimented her on her wit.

But as Sir Peter turned involuntarily and noticed Jack carefully arranging the shawl about his granny's head, the perspiration beaded on his brow.

"Come, Anne," he said lightly, "let us not keep the horses waiting for a crazy woman's talk."

But Kitty shrank behind her father as she caught sight of the mill overlooker.

"Yon is the man that flogged me, father," she whispered.

"I'm glad I have seen him, lass," said Vipond grimly.

Now man is a religious animal, and any history, sociology or art which ignores this fact goes askew. Be a man ever so proud or degraded, he is apt in the face of disaster, to exclaim, "My God!"

At any rate, the broken-down colliers and sympathising villagers decided with one consent that Dolling's Tree was the place for them on this Sunday afternoon.

Dolling would have " summut " to say to them.

Therefore, when the shoemaker arrived with a few faithful adherents, he was astounded to see a congregation of several hundreds.

This was not the rollicking, mocking crowd which sometimes gathered to pester him. Death, maiming, and the shadow of Oldcastle Jail had subdued. The leaders had vanished; only the weak, the perplexed, the sycophant remained, and the preacher, ever sensitive to the spiritual, was moved by the sight of them.

" Friends," he said simply, " the Lord has not yet given me a message. Let us pray ! "

Men and women instantly fell on their knees, and sobs broke from burdened and discouraged hearts, as Dolling pleaded before his Lord that the people were as sheep without a shepherd in the midst of ravening wolves. Then, bringing out his worn old book of Watts' hymns, he read verse by verse for his illiterate congregation, and Jack, waiting for this moment, took up his fiddle and became organ and choir for the hymn : " *Jesus shall reign.*"

> " *Blessings abound where'er He reigns,*
> *The prisoner leaps to lose his chains,*
> *The weary find eternal rest,*
> *And all the sons of want are blessed.*"

And with the singing of the hymn Dolling found his message.

" Behold, I make all things new ! " he cried, with a face alight with hope. " Brethren and sisters, in the past I have sought for all things new in heaven ! But I have seen a vision. I have seen all things new on earth ! " And for half an hour they listened intently to the homely eloquence of the preacher. " 'Tis the Lord Himself who works in the pits. 'Tis the Lord Himself Who lies in Oldcastle Jail. 'Tis the Lord Himself who lives in Joe Tempest's childer, for whatsoever we do to the least of these, we do to HIM ! " And though Dolling had no scheme of material hope to offer, he had lifted his audience into touch with the infinite, and men and women, though they knew it not, had seen God.

As Richards paused, not caring to come too near, he heard Jack's voice leading the closing hymn :

" We're marching upward to Zion,
The beautiful City of God ! "

" Aye," he muttered sourly, " marching to Zion at the end of a rope ! "

The arrival of Vipond was a great event, and at the close of the meeting they crowded round to offer their greetings ; and Robbie Graham passed round the news that he had written a true account of what had happened the previous night, and was riding off to Oldcastle to see if he could get it printed in the *Oldcastle Gazette*, and send off a copy by the post to London.

" And I'll get a look in at the jail, too ! " he remarked with a knowing wink.

XII

NANCY'S PARTY

NANCY had a rare party in her cottage that night. Vipond and Kitty were the guests, and she and Jack brought out their choicest stores to provide the feast.

Yet Nancy was worried.

" There's summut I want to remember, and I can't," she said, clasping her head.

" Don't worrit, granny ! " advised Jack.

" But I must worrit. It is summut about thee ! "

But it seemed no use to worry her poor memory, so she sat with her hands in her lap, listening as Vipond entertained two breathless children with judiciously cut accounts of his adventures.

Kitty sat on his knee, stroking his cheek or threading her hard little fingers through his heavy beard. Never before had she had some one of her very own, and the wonder grew.

" There is one lot of folks I shall always bless," said Vipond as he rose to fulfil his promise to return Kitty in good time. " And them's the Quakers. There was a settlement of them out yonder, and it was them that plucked the despair from my soul."

" But Quakers have coal pits and mills ! " said Jack argumentatively.

" Aye, money making plays t' devil with Jew and Gentile, and doesn't miss out t' Quakers ; but for what they did for me out yonder, I say God bless them ! "

But night fell, all too soon, and the three hurried off for the two-mile walk, Jack carrying a bag of apples for the other children, and Vipond entrancing Kitty by giving her a great chunk of tobacco to take to Old Billy.

Now Richards was beginning to believe in Providence, for having growing doubts as to whether he could, after all, get a conviction against Jack on his present evidence, he was thinking the matter out as he watched the woods which skirted the path along which the three were going. Suddenly he pulled an underkeeper's arm and bade him listen, as Jack's voice could be distinctly heard.

" Aye, Kitty, thoo shall have a pair of shoes with silver buckles and diamonds."

" Diamonds—real ? "

" Real ! Twelve on each buckle."

" But Jack, how will ta get them ? "

" Happen I'll make them grow on a tree in Nancy's garden."

Kitty laughed gaily at the nonsense.

" Thoo'll have to get t' seed ! "

" Oh, I'll find the seed, easy enough," said Jack, with a gay confidence.

" You heard that ? " demanded Richards to his underling.

" Aye, sir."

" Then put it in the back of your head. You may have to swear to it in court one of these days."

But the children passed on, unconscious of danger, save that when Kitty saw the lights of the workhouse a terror gripped her.

" You are certain sure, father, that you can get me ? "

" I'll rive down England afore they shall keep my own lass from me ! " he said with confidence.

" And if Adam Strong won't let you have a cottage in Bracken Fell, sir, you can bide with granny and me," said Jack brilliantly.

" Oh ! " Kitty threw her arms round Jack's neck and kissed him in childish rapture.

" And we will soon clear tha of yon frock and shawl, and get t' nature into thy hair," said Vipond, laying a hand on his daughter's head.

They saw her through the gate, and watched as she ran up the stone steps.

"Good-bye! Good-bye, Jack!" rang out the shrill voice into the night.

"Good-bye, Kitty! Good-bye, Golden Hair!" came the answer.

XIII

INTERRUPTION

About one thing Vipond had made up his mind. He was not going to allow his daughter to re-enter Strong's mill.

He recognised, however, that she was bound and must be unbound; so drawing on experience, he decided that he had better take the job by the smooth handle, dearly as he would like to have swung the biggest stick he could lift.

Not that he altogether discarded the stick in case of emergency, for he carried a very substantial one as he went off to waylay a certain overlooker on the road to the mill.

Bullies are proverbially cowards, and when the overlooker saw the blacksmith confronting him in an awkwardly narrow lane, he also decided that under certain circumstances smooth handles were best. So he asked with polite nervousness, what, precisely, Vipond wanted.

"Well sir, I happen to be t' father of Kitty Vipond."

It was the overlooker's place to stare, and Vipond laughed grimly.

"Aye, and I happen to have seen the sort of work you have made of my lass's back. My own hand could make even a better job, if it got well going on the fellow who drew blood from my daughter."

"The lass was——" began the overlooker, but Vipond stopped him with a motion.

"I want to hear nowt about t' lass. But she is not going to Strong's mill again. So I'll thank you to see that her apprenticeship is broke this very morning. I shall be telling t' parish overseers that I've made it right with you. See?"

The overlooker did see. He also realised that his master had been annoyed at the incident, and hinted that he did not like such open scandals. It therefore only remained for the man to assure the blacksmith that he would be delighted to give Kitty the morning's leave, and that he would do his utmost to induce his master to cancel the indentures. He had

sense enough to withhold his opinion that Kitty was such a mischief-maker amongst the other children, that the mill would be well shot of her.

"Very well!" said Vipond, "and see here, I don't expect nowt for nowt in this world——" He paused as he fidgetted regretfully with his stick, "but later on, if five guineas is any use to you—well——" He caught the man's eye. The two understood one another completely.

Then he hurried off to meet the cart, from which he claimed his enraptured daughter, and took her off to the inn for breakfast, promising that later she should have clothes fit for a princess.

Now Jack was not altogether an idle boy. He was up early to look after the poultry and garden, and he had taken upon him to keep his granny in bed, until he had prepared the kitchen and the breakfast as skilfully as any woman.

On this Monday morning, as they sat over their porridge, Jack was full of talk and ideas.

"Eh, granny," he said, "it would be grand if we could build two new rooms, and then Mr. Vipond and Kitty could live along of us, and if he starts his smithy, I could go as his first apprentice, and Kitty could do the housework like a lady!"

"Aye, it would be grand!" admitted Nancy, but a well-known horn was heard, and Jack leaped up.

"A letter from Mistress Mary!" he exclaimed. He rushed off to the postman, distinguished by his faded scarlet and blue, and received a friendly nod and the expected letter.

Breakfast was of no further interest to Jack, as he broke the seals and then began to read:

"Dear Jack,—I was glad to have your last letter, and to notice how well you are getting on with your writing, but do take pains about the spelling, and learn as much as ever you can from kind Mr. Dolling. Mr. Ross and I have been thinking much about you, and in your next letter, please tell us what trade you wish to follow, for we want you to be a good, steady worker at the trade you really like.

"It seems so long since I was at Bracken Fell, but my children cannot travel well; but very soon I hope we shall be living at a place called Sandby, near Manchester, and then one day I hope you will come over and see us, and we can talk about everything.

"Do remember Jack that we want you to be honest and true and God-fearing, so that you may be one of God's men in the world when you are grown up. And remember that whatever trouble you may get into, you have always a true friend in

MISTRESS MARY."

"When Mistress Mary knows about the poor miners, perhaps she will come and help them," said Jack hopefully.

But suddenly there came the sound of footsteps and a sharp rap at the door. Before Jack could open it, the constable entered, followed by four officers, who crowded into the kitchen.

"This is the lad!" said the constable, and to his amazement and dismay, Jack found himself gripped by two officers, and in spite of furious remonstrance, his hands were handcuffed behind him.

Nancy uttered wild incoherent cries, of which the men took no notice, but Jack, growing cool in the emergency, asked why he was arrested.

The constable took out a paper.

"You are charged, my lad, with the theft of a pair of silver and diamond buckles from the Manor House on Saturday night."

They all noticed with satisfaction the tell-tale flush which dyed the boy's pale face, spreading to his throat and ears.

As Jack would have thrust out a fierce hand of protest, he realised the true horror of his position. The iron was not yet warm on his wrists.

"I never stole them!" he cried passionately, "they dropped on the floor. Take me to the Manor House and I will find them for you."

The constable smiled.

"'Tis clear enough that you had them in your hands!" he said, "but it may be as well if you take care what you say."

"Why should I take care?" exclaimed Jack proudly. "'Tis only the truth I would speak."

"They all say that!" said the constable, nodding towards the officers. "Come, get the lad off, can't you?" for he was afraid he might be moved by the boy's anxious eyes.

But Nancy began to scream and cling to the prisoner, and it was no easy matter to tear away her arms.

"Now, now, Mistress Fodderty," said the constable.

" There is no use in going against the law—but if you care to put a bit of food in the lad's pocket—well, there is no harm in that."

In an instant Nancy was cramming Jack's pockets with food, until, half laughing, half crying, he begged her to stop.

" Granny ! " he whispered, as she gave him a last kiss, " Tell Mr. Dolling and Mr. Vipond."

Jack found himself lifted to a horse in front of an officer, to be taken off to Oldcastle, and it was the knowledge that he could not even wave his hands to his granny which drove the tears down his cheeks. But with a toss of the head, Jack threw them off, remembering that he was twelve years old and must behave as a man.

Nancy stood for some moments swaying herself back and forwards, clasping her hands to her head, and trying to remember what Jack had told her to do. But she could not remember, except that she had a vague impression she was to go to the village.

She flung a shawl over her head and began to run, and to her joy she was nearly overridden by Robbie Graham, who had galloped in from Oldcastle with a mouthful of news concerning the colliers and the coming assizes.

" Why, Mistress Fodderty ? " he exclaimed kindly enough.

" Oh, Robbie ! " she sobbed, " in God's name tell me what Jack told me to do ? "

" Jack ? " Robbie swung from his horse, and took her hand.

" Aye, my Jack ! They have taken him off to Oldcastle—on a horse—with his hands chained behind him." Then, as Robbie looked at her incredulously, she added, " 'Tis not mad Nancy who is speaking. 'Tis the real Nancy before she began to hate and the pain came into her head ! "

" Tell me ! " said Robbie, for obviously something serious had happened, the truth of which he must get from the distracted woman.

" They say he stole silver buckles from the Manor House—but if he had stolen anything he would have brought it straight to his granny. He always does ! "

" Hush ! Hush ! " exclaimed Robbie, alarmed at Nancy's frank admission of past theft. " We had better go right off to Mr. Dolling and Mr. Vipond. They will be Jack's best friends."

Nancy looked at him with rapture.

"That is what Jack told his granny to do—to go to Mr. Dolling and Mr. Vipond."

Robbie was glad he had fathomed some of the poor woman's perplexities, and as he walked quietly beside her, leading his horse, his thoughts whirled.

A theft of silver buckles—from a house! If it could be proved against the boy it might mean hanging. John Wolfson's son to be hanged for common felony! It was unthinkable. Robbie quickened his pace nervously, then slacked again, remembering his companion's feebleness. But a turn in the road brought him some relief.

A tall black-bearded man came in sight, with a child in a bright scarlet cloak dancing along by his side.

It took Vipond and Kitty some moments to take in the full horror of Robbie's story, interrupted as it was with the frantic exclamations of Nancy.

Oldcastle Jail! Jack to be flung into that filth of iniquity, to take his chance for life or death, physical or moral. Yet there lay the fact—bare—tremendous. Vipond alone understood completely what it meant, and his very quietness showed how deeply he was moved.

Kitty only understood that something dreadful had happened to Jack, at the very hour when she herself was gay with the wildest joy that had ever entered her melancholy life. What was the fun of her new cloak, her stockings and shining shoes, if she could not show them to Jack?

The men consulted eagerly, and Nancy added the sagacious idea that if money was wanted, she had plenty laid by; as the whole object of her economy was for Jack's future, they decided that money must be spent to get Jack off. Vipond then suggested that Kitty should go with Nancy, while he and Robbie went off to consult Mr. Dolling.

Dolling listened intently as Robbie told the story.

"Of course, he is innocent," Robbie concluded.

"God grant it may be so," said Dolling anxiously, "but listen," and he read a few lines from Jack's letter to Mistress Mary: "'At the manner house I saw such lovely things, and I wanted to steel them all to give to Kitty. She is the lass I am going to marry, only my granny says steeling gives boys black souls. . . . It is very hard not to steel things when Kitty wants them.'"

"My God!" exclaimed Vipond, "Now I think of it, he and my Kitty were chattering last night on the open road about a pair of silver buckles and real diamonds. He was promising them to her—I wasn't taking any particular notice."

"Well—whether he took them or not, the lad must have counsel—there is not an hour to be lost with the assizes coming on this week."

"But no counsel may address the jury when a prisoner is tried for his life," said Dolling. "I was through all that with a poor labourer last year. Counsel might examine his witnesses, but when it came to defence, he had to defend himself—ignorant, stammering, half-starved with confinement—terrified—gave his case away at every mouthful. Still—counsel might instruct the lad what to say."

So they thrashed the matter out gloomily enough, and it was decided that Vipond should go at once to Oldcastle, seek to get at the truth from Jack, and give him what food and money were needed. For Oldcastle Jail was farmed out, and he who had the most money had the best chance of softening the jailer's heart, and the best chance of decent food and light irons. Woe betide the unfortunate who lingered, awaiting trial with an empty purse.

Robbie cursed his luck that he could not ride straight to London to see whether Mrs. Ross could move on Jack's behalf, but he was due on his ship that night.

"It is terrible that there is so little time," said Dolling.

"Aye," said Robbie, "but by what they told me yesterday of the prisoners who had died during the last few months of jail fever, perhaps Jack is as well to be hanged this week, as rot to his death in jail."

"The ways of the Lord are mysterious!" said Dolling.

"It's not the ways of the Lord, but the ways of men that are mysterious," said Vipond, with exceeding bitterness.

"Aye, you would think so," said Robbie resentfully, "if you had seen them as I did yesterday. Thirty men and boys in one underground hole. Stench, chains, quarrelling, bullying, the weakest going to the wall—what chance has a lad amongst a crowd of poor maddened beasts?"

"The colliers will stand by him," said Dolling. "Everyone likes Nancy's Jack. If I know the lad, he will take his lot bravely, and will be singing to them before nightfall. Friends—let us pray for all prisoners!" And the three knelt in that

small back room and one at least wondered why, if God existed, He did not throw down a thunderbolt to free men from their chains.

"Till man wants release, God is helpless!" said Dolling, as though sensing the doubt.

"I'll add this news to Jack's letter to Mistress Mary, and we'll get it off by the post," said Dolling, picking up the sheet.

XIV

ON HORSEBACK TO JAIL

In spite of the triumph of the dragoons, a curious stubbornness had settled down upon Bishop's End. No man turned out to go down the pit.

Perhaps Dolling's words had strengthened them, but, leaderless as they were, they decided that this day must be one of mourning and of the burial of the dead. It was even mooted that they might go *en masse* to Oldcastle and demand the release of their companions, before agreeing to go back to work.

So powerful was the resisting atmosphere, that Lord Rawby, advised by an anxious manager, made a virtue of necessity, and put up a notice that the pit was closed, "Owing to the accident." The reason might mean anything or nothing, but it was as well to mark time.

Jack, secure on horseback, had time to gather his wits together, and it pleased him to realise that Bishop's End lay between him and the main road to Oldcastle. By dint of masterly wheedling, he managed to prevail on his captors to handcuff him with his hands in front, and as they rode into the village, Jack was instantly recognised, and to the astonishment of the officer, the crowd came running.

"Jack! Nancy's Jack!" so the cry passed, roughly and clamourously.

"So they fight lads, do they?" cried a collier, and he and others barred the way.

"They say I am a thief—and it is a lie—and I am going to Oldcastle Jail!" shouted Jack.

"Then—tell our folks—we are main proud of them!" cried another, and messages for the imprisoned men showered.

"Tell our Joe—his row of mignonette will be buried with Jim and Ted," called a woman's voice.

But the officers put spurs to their horses.

"Good luck!" called Jack, reaching out his manacled hands.

"You have queer friends," said the officer grimly.

"Aye, they all like Nancy's Jack!" said the boy, his heart comforted at the pitiful ovation. "If they hang me at Oldcastle they will come—many of them—to see."

The calm, proud callousness of this young prisoner puzzled the man.

"You have spirit, lad!" he admitted.

"I am John Wolfson's son," said the boy.

But Jack knew that his spirit was but a feeble flame after all. Not six months ago, he had escaped from Nancy and gone all the way to Oldcastle to see a hanging.

He had watched three men hanged for sheep stealing, and a boy of fourteen hanged for stealing a blanket. He had boasted on his return of what he had seen, but, in truth, the sight had haunted him ever since.

One of the men had been a coward—and that was terrible. But the boy had laughed and waved farewell to the crowd. He also would be brave. He would laugh to the end. So Jack was thinking, when all at once he shrank together and gave a muffled cry, and the officer held him more firmly.

In Oldcastle Jail a dozen sullen men talked hopelessly. What was the use of struggling against such frightful odds? Would their sacrifice do any good, either to themselves or to those who were to follow them? Why not let the industrial masters blow them to pieces, lengthen their hours, take their wages, hamper their liberty, murder their children? Why not let the masters do anything their mammon-armoured souls suggested to them? Why not let the jail fever take them, as it had taken four prisoners, since they had been thrust into that stench-laden room?

They had been somewhat cheered by Robbie Graham, who, owing to a convenient relationship with the jailor's wife, had managed to get the weight of their irons reduced. It was illegal to iron untried prisoners, but none in Oldcastle considered legality, if money could be wrung by illegality. They had also been comforted by love gifts from the surrounding colliery districts, precious in themselves and doubly precious as coming from comrades in poverty and suffering.

It was towards the end of the morning that the door was

unlocked and a boy was pushed in on them, with ankle chains and wrist chains. He stood bewildered, scared, and breathing rapidly.

A mocking laugh greeted him, and one of the older prisoners was laying a hand on his shoulder, when Tempest, springing forward, felled him to the ground. The prisoner was leaping up to retaliate, but the one-armed collier was ready for him.

"You touch yon lad, and you'll have twelve Bishop's Enders making you wish your mother had never borne you!" The man cringed away, but Jack, looking into Tempest's face, uttered a sobbing cry as he clung to him.

Tempest drew him to a corner, and, motioning to his comrades, they drew together to hear Jack's story. Their sympathy was as water to his soul, and he turned out his pockets, imploring them to share what he had.

"Nay, lad," said Tempest, "keep what thoo has; and stick to us, and we'll look after tha, as long as we can!"

Jack gave the messages the villagers had shot after him, and presently, worn out with excitement, the boy sank down on the filthy floor and fell asleep, while the colliers formed a bodyguard around him.

XV

IN LONDON

Mary Ross had been enjoying a happy hour helping her nurse to put Donald and Jean to bed. She had seen them clean and snug for the night, had heard their childish prayers, and told them a fairy story, and then she had gone downstairs, hoping that David would not be late for supper. For David was spending all time not taken up by his art in seeking to get at the truth of things, in company with a few progressive men and women who, in every age, find themselves burdened with the injustice of what they see around them.

It is never easy to lift up the light to evil, for men shrink from looking, and scorn the light-bearers. Reformers of 1805 had discovered this, and from right to left the shafts of criticism and worse fell thickly around them.

"What a fight it is!" exclaimed David, as he flung himself down, worn out with worry.

"Tell me," she said, with a world of sympathy in her tone.

"If only the ordinary person had the least imagination. We sleep in our beds and eat our dinners and play with our children, while horror upon horror piles at our doors." He tugged out his pipe restlessly. "I paint my pictures, and glimmers of the pains and penalties of the poor gain credit, but for the most part—— Three of us went to Newgate this afternoon! We, who call ourselves society, trample on one another, and then, when the man, woman or child under our feet turns and bites—we flog, transport—hang——" he suddenly pulled up, smiled at his wife, and drew a letter from his pocket.

"My love-letter from Jack!" she said happily, and reading it aloud her face was bright, until she glanced towards Mr. Dolling's postscript.

"Oh David—listen! Jack is in trouble—liable for hanging—on charge of stealing Catherine's shoe buckles. What can possess Peter to let such a charge develop?"

David took the letter and re-read the whole thoughtfully.

"It seems clear that the boy has been tempted."

"I wonder," she said miserably. "I feel as if I wanted to rush off to the north to see this thing through. Even if Jack were guilty, we can't have a child hanged for stealing Catherine's shoe buckles!"

"No!" said David. "Even we have no real imagination. When we happen to know the particular boy—well—it cuts! And these colliers—perhaps—— Isn't that the *Oldcastle Gazette?*"

"How silly of me!" said Mary, and tearing the paper open, she searched down the columns, and though there was nothing about Jack, there was Robbie Graham's account of the colliery disaster, its consequences, and the list of grievances which the colliers had handed in.

"Let us both post off to Bracken Fell and see if we can put sense into Peter!" said Mary impulsively.

"No!" said David thoughtfully, "but I think you ought to go. They hang very quickly after sentence, and if the worst comes, you must send me a messenger, and I may be able to do something in London. I should get strong support against hanging so young a boy, only—one would have to act at once."

Earnestly husband and wife consulted as true helpmates,

and it was arranged that Mary was to start at once with a manservant.

"And I do want to see Peter!" and she sighed. "It is so terrible about the colliery. It is quite five years since he promised that upcast shaft. It is Anne and Lord Rawby who drag him down. He seems to be helpless in their hands. It is—to me—a tragedy."

It was certainly as well that Mary should hurry, for his honour the judge had arrived, and round the district tongues were wagging and tempers were rising, and in Oldcastle Jail prisoners were looking into one another's eyes, as dumb cattle scenting the slaughter-house.

XVI

THE GAMBLE OF THE COURTS

THERE was no lack of ceremony in Oldcastle when the High Sheriff, with his train of officers and county magistrates, went forth to meet the judge for the assizes.

If gold lace, cocked hats, equipages, prancing horses and fussing office-bearers could establish the honour of English justice, then justice was well established.

The local coal magnates, with Lord Rawby at their head, were anxious; for popular support is as the breath of life to oppression, however much the oppressor may deny it, and an article in the *Oldcastle Gazette* was already inclining a thoughtful minority to question the use of soldiers on exasperated workers.

Juries are but human, and may be influenced by atmosphere as other men, and if juries cannot be depended upon to back up the prosecution, where will honest folk be able to sleep in peace?

But at the "Star and Garter," where the gentlemen of Oldcastle district assembled for a better meal than could be got elsewhere, Lord Rawby assured the doubters that though the editor of the *Gazette* richly deserved flogging at the cart tail, there was no doubt but that a jury selected from property owners and shopkeepers would stand firmly against any interference with the complete liberty of the employer, for this monstrous development of brawling would, if it were allowed

to go unchecked, make Oldcastle no better than Paris or Marseilles.

He had news, he assured them, from those on whom he could rely, that there was every possibility of such disturbances during the assizes as would play into their hands and secure a verdict.

It was cheering also to know that there were judges and judges. This northern circuit judge was noted for his passion for getting through business and curtailing the sittings. As the assizes lengthened the judge's temper shortened, and any attempt to overawe the calm dignity of the law by mob violence, set every nerve in his body quivering. And, finally, his honour had recently been writing strongly against the repeated efforts that were being made in legal and lay circles to allow prisoners for felony to have the full use of their counsel. How were they ever to clear the jails, he argued, if prisoners' counsels were to be allowed to make long speeches in defence, to say nothing of the insult to the court by indecorous wranglings between lawyers, when a man's life was in question? It was enough that the prosecution should make its case. It was for the judge to see that the prisoner had fair play, and it was a detestable misrepresentation on the part of unbalanced individuals to assert that a judge was more likely to act as executioner than as judge, when some poor bewildered prisoner tried to stammer out his defence to a charge he had never properly heard, until brought into the full publicity of the court, after months of shattering confinement.

Vipond and Dolling had seen to it that counsel was engaged on Jack's behalf, but inasmuch as the true indictment, the evidence against him, and the names of the witnesses were withheld until he faced the court, Jack could only tell his own side of the story, and even as he told it, he fancied the lawyer doubted. How could he make clear the varying emotions and motives, founded on the fairy tale of a prince and princess dreaming of golden hair and buckled shoes?

When Jack was returned to the cell and told his misgivings to Tempest, the older man knew that the scales were weighted heavily against the boy, for, after all, the prosecution had the last word.

By the time the first two days were over the prison was perceptibly emptier. Sentences of transportation, imprisonment and two death-sentences for sheep stealing and burglary

had been passed. Men gambled on their probable sentences, for punishments were so severe that both judge, jury and witnesses often shrank from a clear issue, and anything might happen. When Jack tried, over and over again, to make Tempest predict his fate, the collier shook his head.

"I don't know, lad," he said kindly. "Folk don't like hanging lads in these days, so—thee make out a good case and keep thy head steady."

Tempest omitted to say that he would rather see Nancy's Jack hanged by the neck in his comparative innocence, than transported in some hell-ship to Botany Bay.

That night, the remaining prisoners demanded with softened manner that Jack should sing to them for the last time, and the boy sang song after song, making the inmates of that den of sorrow laugh and clap and weep and curse. But when all was darkness, Jack lay very still, struggling with his despair. In vain he repeated over and over the "Our Father."

"There can be no 'Father' here," he decided. Then he thought of Mistress Mary. Would she come to help the poor colliers? She had wanted him to be honest and true and God-fearing—"one of God's men in the world." Jack smiled mockingly into the darkness, as he heard one of the prisoners cursing in his sleep.

What would Mistress Mary say, when she heard he had been hanged as a thief? For to Jack's mind the theft of a hare or a bird or a lump of wood or a bundle of hay was no crime, but to be charged with stealing Miss Catherine's birthday present was a disgrace that was crushing all spirit out of him.

"Good-bye, little singer!" said Joe on the following morning.

He and the colliers were about to leave for the court, and Jack felt their departure as marking the beginning of the end.

"Good-bye!" said Jack falteringly.

Joe felt the lump in his own throat, for this boy had crept into his heart during these days of common suffering. His twins were, after all, safely in their graves, where the wicked cease from troubling, but this living, suffering, sensitive boy, the beginning of a living, sensitive man—how could he leave him?

"Remember, lad," he said simply, "that whatever happens, thou art John Wolfson's son. He was a good man. The world may tear tha to bits, limb from limb, but none can make

tha do wrong—none can make tha betray the poor, and one day——"

But the jailer was in a hurry. He had been warned to get his prisoners safely into court before the crowd outside increased. So the colliers were taken, and made to climb into the clumsy cart which was to convey them to their trial.

But already the crowd was considerable enough to greet them with an astonishing volume of cheering and wild greeting. The victory, so far, seemed to be with the prisoners, for public opinion was shocked at the pit disaster, and looked with more sympathy than usual on the surging mass of begrimed men and women, who excitedly thronged the narrow streets.

Nancy had, moreover, become an anxiety to her friends, for in her fury at Jack's arrest she had worked herself into one of her wildest frenzies. She had gone up and down amongst the colliers, capturing their imaginations, as she urged in prophetic tone that the Day of the Lord would come at Oldcastle that week, and the powers of darkness be shattered. The people only half believed her, but they did know that squads of yeomanry were already stationed at Rawby Castle and the Manor House, and that Oldcastle was crammed with them. It was strange that the State should supply soldiers to guard the homes of wealth while it left the homes of the poor at the mercy of any who cared to wreck them.

Therefore, as the cart moved off with these martyrs of the people's cause, the prisoners received a wild ovation.

"Good luck! Good cheer! Stand by us, Joe!" so the greetings came, and many tried to get near to give personal messages.

The welcome was a good stimulant to receive before descending to the sordid atmosphere of the court, but the uproar had reached the ears of his honour, and he inquired sharply what it meant.

"Doubtless, your honour, it is the mob, supporting the prisoners on the way to their trial," said Lord Rawby quietly.

"Ah!" said his honour.

It was impossible for these unlettered men to understand fully the complication of charges laid against them.

The prosecution was eloquent on the fact that the men had gathered in defiance of the law against combination, and had conspired to assemble at the Manor House on the Saturday

evening. They had presented a list of grievances, and had boldly threatened to break the yearly bond by refusing to work until such grievances were redressed. But, further, they had taken care to provide themselves with an army of rioters to support them, and these same rioters had caused grievous bodily injury to several servants, had insulted Sir Peter Mason's guests, and were only prevented from wrecking the place through the opportune appearance of the yeomanry.

In conclusion, the prosecutor was of the opinion that the chief culprit and ringleader was the prisoner, Joe Tempest. He would call evidence to show that he had used insulting language to Sir Peter Mason and Lord Rawby, and had himself presented the list of grievances and uttered the threat of refusal to work.

The witnesses were called, including a renegade collier who was, in fact, a master's spy, and Lord Rawby.

Tempest asked the first witness how much money he had received to betray his comrades, but was promptly told that the question was out of order.

He faced Lord Rawby with controlled indignation.

"Did you see, my lord, on the morning of the disaster, my two dead grandsons carried from the pit in my arms and the arms of their mother?"

"Yes," admitted the witness.

"Didn't you promise us colliers, five years ago, that you would provide an upcast shaft to prevent explosion?"

"No. I never gave a written promise."

"I didn't say 'written'; I said, did you ever give a promise —in June, 1800, when seventeen were brought up dead."

"I have no remembrance whatever of any such promise," said the witness coldly.

"Would you say, my lord, that a murderer might easily forget a promise?" But the prisoner was called to order.

But later, Tempest, having loyally admitted responsibility in his endeavour to save the others, was allowed to make his defence, and he made it so well, and poured forth the wrongs of the colliers with so rough and biting an eloquence, that the judge decided that here was a very clever dangerous fellow, who would be safest out of the country.

"Your worship," cried Tempest, forgetting his danger in the passion of his protest, "we humble colliers want no sedition, as yon man has lied," and he thrust out his arm

towards the prosecutor. "We are England's men and our wives are England's women! But we want a roof over our heads, we want to work in safety at fair pay, and we want our children brought up in freedom and health and gladness. If we are to be punished for wanting these things when they are denied to us—well—so let it be—but call not England England, but a land of tyranny and slavery. And your worship——" and he gave a glance towards his fellows, "if any one has to go down for this business—let it be me. They have murdered my grandchildren—let their grandfather follow them!"

It was clear that some of the jury were moved by the appeal, but in his summing up the judge showed so powerfully the danger to society of this open and brazen combination of worker against employer, which led straight to the tumbrils and the guillotine, that the jury was reconvinced.

Tempest received seven years' transportation, and the others various terms of imprisonment.

Tempest smiled. At least he had partially saved his comrades. In vain his wife struggled to get near him. She was thrust back, so darting out into the street she flashed out the news.

"A rescue! A rescue!" some one shouted as the cart containing the condemned prisoners appeared. There was an ugly rush, and men clambered about the cart.

"Lads!" shouted Tempest, "save yourselves to keep the fight going. One day—the true England will arise!"

He spoke none too soon, for the yeomanry were clearing the streets, and men, women and children fled. Several of the would-be rescuers were arrested, and some sort of order was restored, save that a few expended their fury by throwing stones at the windows of the "Star and Garter."

When the court adjourned, Lord Rawby and his friends, well satisfied with the result, enjoyed a choice dinner. Law and order had been vindicated, and Lord Rawby handsomely offered to make good to the landlord the damage his house had suffered in so great a cause.

XVII

THE PRISONER DOES HIS BEST

THE judge was getting impatient as the afternoon cases dragged on, and decided that he might get in the case of Wolfson, on a charge of felony, before the adjournment.

So Jack stood in the dock, his cheeks flushed, his eyes bright, his hands gripped. Looking round him desperately, he was cheered and strengthened at sight of Mr. Dolling and Mr. Vipond.

With great persuasion the men had kept Nancy at home in charge of Kitty, for, indeed, the woman was so excitable that she would have done more harm than good to her boy.

Jack had been warned by his counsel to listen very carefully to the full charge; yet how hard, in that stifling court, crowded and expectant, for any prisoner, on trial for his life, to concentrate.

Yet he learned that he was charged with having taken advantage of the colliers' deputation to the Manor House, to secrete himself in the gun room, and steal a valuable pair of buckles from a case. But when counsel for the prosecution rose, Jack became confused and worried, and could not indeed, understand the meaning of many of his words and expressions. Vaguely he gathered that not only was his crime for stealing before the court, but it was to be proved that he was a well-known rascal, a plague to every farmer and gamekeeper in the district.

Not that there was any specific charge, but the insinuations were enough, and it seemed as though all his boyish escapades were suddenly piled upon his back to weight him to perdition.

But Jack's attention became painfully intense as the counsel asserted, not only that he could bring a witness to prove that the boy had been seen with the buckles in his hand, but the prisoner had openly boasted that he would give them to a parish child, whose father was a man of infamous character, just returned from transportation.

The boy's brain whirled, for he had completely forgotten his laughing nonsense with Kitty.

He was not surprised that Richards was called as first

witness, to swear to the gun-room story as told by the prosecuting counsel.

Then Richards swore that on Sunday night he had been to the woods with the underkeeper, and together they had heard the prisoner promise silver buckles with diamonds on them—twelve on each—to the little girl who was with him. The prisoner had spoken of the seed for the buckles being already in the ground, and at the suggestion of counsel, Richards agreed that he took that to mean that the buckles had been safely buried in the prisoner's garden, until the outcry had ceased.

"You can't prove that, you coward!" shouted Jack, in excited amazement. He was quickly quelled, and his own counsel now examined the witness. He tried to get in his points in Jack's favour, but Richards was astute enough to stick resolutely to his tale.

The underkeeper had been well primed and his story was a direct one, which Jack felt himself incapable of denying or explaining. Amazed at the fineness of the mesh that was tightening around him, the boy grew cold and hot by turns, and had to cling to the dock to keep himself upright. Even brave encouraging nods from his friends could not cheer him.

The awkwardness of the position was increased by the fact that Jack's "character" was a strange one, and the poaching laws were so terrible that even Dolling dared not go into the witness box, in case he was tripped into some disastrous admission.

But when Jack's turn came to tell his story, it was clear that he had the sympathy of the court as he turned clear eyes towards the judge.

"Please your honour, I didn't steal Miss Catherine's buckles. Richards knows I didn't. I took them out of the case and looked at them. I counted the diamonds—there were twelve on each buckle. Then I dropped them by accident, and I was frightened at being in a mischief—and so—I pushed them under the desk with my foot and shut up the case and put it back. I bet Richards really has them, for if he had thought I took them, he could have got me easy—right away. I wanted to go to the Manor House to show the constable where they were, but they wouldn't let me, please your honour."

The judge did not look up. He was writing carefully.

"And please, your honour, what I said to the little girl was just a fairy tale. She and me are going to be married—if your honour doesn't hang me. She wanted silver buckles instead of workhouse clogs, and I said I could get her some like Miss Catherine was going to have for a birthday present."

"And this seed you spoke of?" asked the judge.

"It was just our fairy tale, your honour!" said Jack with a pleading smile. "I only meant that I was going to work in the garden to make money to buy the buckles for her. And—and—there isn't anything more I can think of to say, only—please don't hang me, your honour!"

"You still plead before the jury that you are not guilty?"

Jack turned with a sudden hope to the jury.

"I am not guilty!" he exclaimed with a renewed strength and pride. "I am John Wolfson's son. My father's son could not steal silver buckles. Richards yonder—always wanted to trip me up."

It was a pity that Jack did not leave out the last sentence, but the sight of the keeper's triumphant smile forced the remark from the tortured boy, and he had no one to warn him.

A few moments earlier Sir Peter had arrived at the back of the bench. He had taken his seat by Lord Rawby, and had not troubled to look towards the dock, until his companion whispered to him:

"Glad you have come back to us. Hope Lady Mason is feeling better. We have done excellently this morning about the colliers, and now that smart young scapegrace is busy getting himself hanged."

But Sir Peter heard no more. His eyes were fixed on the dishevelled, white-faced prisoner.

The prosecuting counsel smiled confidently as he rose to address the jury, and with consummate ease he riddled all Jack's points, upheld his case, and showed up the dangerous smartness and address of the young prisoner.

Jack stood very upright and proud. He knew it was all over for him, and his whole being thrilled with the desire to play the game and not let any one, in all that horrible place, know that he cared.

The judge's summing up was brief, and full of regret that

so young a boy should have become so hardened a liar. The jury had good direction and were weary of their business, and it was not necessary to leave the box. Jack knew the verdict even before the fatal word was pronounced by the foreman.

"And now, prisoner," said the judge sternly, "have you anything to say as to why the sentence of death should not be passed upon you?"

"Death—hanging!" broke from the prisoner, as though at last he understood in a newer and more dreadful way. "But what will your honour do when your honour finds out that John Wolfson's son is not a liar?"

Sir Peter's face was ashen. He pushed his way to the judge, who turned round surprised.

"I haven't heard this case, my lord, but—he is such a child!"

But this amazing interference did not please his lordship. Sir Peter saw it, and shrank back, and Lord Rawby laughed as he returned to his side.

"You wished to save yonder young nightingale? But he is a glib liar. Monstrous that he should have been picking and stealing at the very time we were settling those confounded colliers."

But the judge was passing sentence. Sir Peter's agonised attention was fixed on a pair of great brown eyes staring wide into space, as though already gazing into another world. Then a heavy hand was laid on the prisoner's shoulder, and he was dragged from the dock.

XVIII

AFTERWARDS

Mary was seated in a post-chaise very anxious and worried at various delays which had occurred as she entered Oldcastle.

She had given orders to drive straight to the assizes, but she soon saw that it would not be easy to get through the turbulent crowd. The town was evidently all on edge with excitement, and colliers, townsfolk, constables and yeomanry were inextricably massed.

But, determined not to lose an unnecessary moment, she

urged the driver to do his best, but he turned and pointed to a seething block of excited persons in front.

The centre appeared to be a prison cart, where a boy was standing, nodding and laughing towards the clamouring and groaning crowd.

"Who is that boy?" exclaimed Mary, as she leaped upright in the chaise.

"Nancy's Jack!" answered a man who was shouldering his way through the crowd. "Why!" his face lighted up. "It is never Mistress Mary—Mrs. Ross?"

"Mistress Mary!" so the word was taken up by a group of villagers from Bracken Fell.

"Mistress Mary! She'll stop t' lad from getting hanged!"

But Mary was leaning over towards Vipond, who was hanging on to the chaise and using his strong elbows to push back the crowd.

"Just sentenced, madam," he explained. "What chance had the lad to defend himself against yon scoundrel Richards and a prosecuting lawyer?"

But the prison cart was pushing forward, through a way forced for it by the yeomanry.

"Jack! I am coming to see you!" So Mary's eager voice rang out. The boy looked round bewildered. Then he saw her.

"Oh—Mistress Mary!" His proud lips twitched. He stretched out his manacled hands, as far as he could, towards her. The crowd groaned and hissed in anger, and the captain of the yeomanry watched intently.

The prisoner passed on, but a dim agonising hope had entered his soul. Mistress Mary, as his fairy godmother, had always had the power to do for him what she would. How could Jack know that even Mistress Mary had but small strength against the "powers that be," prejudiced to keep a world crooked, for want of the vision to set it straight?

Jack was taken into the jail, not as he hoped, to meet Tempest and the colliers, but into a smaller cell in which he found two men who had been condemned to death. Those cell walls, if they could have spoken, had seen more than one boy of Jack's age fling himself down in despair.

"Here is our little cock-chicken!" said one of the men, not unkindly. "So thou art to swing, too?"

"Aye!" said Jack. Then he sank down in his rattling chains on a bench.

But almost immediately his name was called sharply, and he sprang up at attention. The jailer led him away to an office, where he found himself in Mistress Mary's presence.

"Oh Jack! Jack! My poor boy!" she cried. Then she turned to the jailer.

"Of your goodness, sir, will you permit me to see this boy in private?" and she pressed gold into his hand.

The jailer knew that Mrs. Ross was of the gentry, and he recognised the clink of guineas. Therefore he left the two together, locking the door behind him.

"Now Jack, tell me," said Mary.

And Jack began, nervously and without confidence, for he did not expect any one to believe him. He was sure that neither Mr. Dolling nor Mr. Vipond really trusted his story, and watching his listener's puzzled expression, he could read kindness and sympathy, but that was all.

"You do not believe what I am telling you, Mistress Mary," he said, and a strange hardness entered his voice, "and sometimes I don't believe it myself—I——" he stopped and bit his lip.

"I want to believe you, Jack," she said earnestly.

"And you have nowt but my word to believe?" He was standing upright before her, and something in the attitude and the toss of his head reminded her of a day long ago, when Peter had denied a charge passionately, to save himself from his father's flogging. But Mary had known on that occasion that her brother was guilty.

But why should this boy, with his neat clothes all soiled and torn, his hair touzled and unkempt, his face and hands dirty, standing in chains before her, remind her of Peter?

"Jack!" she exclaimed impulsively, "I will take your word against it all!"

The boy gazed at her as though spellbound. Then he sank down at her knee in a paroxysm of weeping.

XIX

SIR PETER'S DILEMMA

In deep disgust at what he had seen in court, Sir Peter sought out Richards, that he might understand; and Richards,

pleased with his success and prospects of gain, was beginning to congratulate his master when, to his surprise, he was cut short.

"But who gave you authority to put this affair into the hands of the law?" said Sir Peter sternly.

"Why sir—did not her ladyship tell you?"

"Her ladyship?" Sir Peter felt his eyes drop before the inquisitive gaze of his man.

"I only acted according to orders, sir," protested Richards. "I discovered the robbery when I took the case up to her, sir. I thought you had left it by mistake in the gun room. It was her ladyship who found the buckles were gone. She told me to set the prosecution on foot, sir. It was clear enough—I had seen the buckles in the young rascal's hands. I saw him counting the diamonds. He saw me watching him, and I never dreamed he would actually have the nerve to take them before my very eyes—as I told her ladyship."

"Ah well, Richards," said Sir Peter, recovering himself, "it has been a most unfortunate occurrence."

"Very unfortunate," admitted Richards, wishing to keep on the right side of his master. But the keeper, after a curt dismissal, found that after all he had miscalculated his luck.

The instant he appeared in the street, an ominous cry was raised, and he was seized.

"That's for Nancy's Jack! And that—and that—and that!" so the blows and kicks rained. Wildly he wrestled and shouted for help, but the maddened crowd got him down, and had mauled him badly before, rescued by the soldiers, he was carried off, bleeding, hatless, coatless, into safety.

Sir Peter, driving to the "Star and Garter" with Lord Rawby in his coach-and-six, was also subjected to the humiliating experience of public execration. Fear limited the outlet of the public passion to a comparatively harmless demonstration of hooting and booing, but the crowd would have been flattered had it realised how its outcries stung.

"The damned rabble!" sneered Lord Rawby. "Now have you any mercy for Bishop's End?"

But Sir Peter could not switch his mind back to any consideration of the colliery.

"Look here, Rawby—we must get that blasted sentence quashed against that child. 'Tis out of all reason in these modern times."

" Certainly a monstrous pity to choke that superb voice, and all for the sake of your daughter's shoe-buckles," admitted Lord Rawby lightly.

Sir Peter escaped as soon as he could from the " Star and Garter " feasting, but on reaching the Manor House he was faced with the surprise of finding his sister taking tea in the old library.

Mary's immediate sensation on hearing that Lady Mason was away had been of relief. It was no use pretending that she and Anne " got on." Anne politely, but very really, mocked at Mary's idealisms and her absurd impulses after lost causes. Mary could not forget that she and Peter had once been all in all to one another, and that somehow Anne had separated them.

So she had asked for tea in the old library, glad that for once she might have her brother to herself.

" Why, little sister ? " he exclaimed.

" Oh, Peter ! " she had risen, and laid an affectionate hand on his shoulder as she kissed him.

" I have left Anne and the children at Bath," he said hurriedly. " Anne is anxious to try another doctor. I know a dozen doctors already whom I should enjoy to set to hard labour on their own prescriptions. But why this sudden visit ? "

" I had a letter from Jack—Nancy's Jack, you know. I came post, because Mr. Dolling told me—Peter—don't be angry with me—it feels like the good old times for you and me to be alone together—but—why—how could you take proceedings against such a child ? "

" I—didn't. I am as annoyed as you."

Mary gave a genuine gasp of relief.

" It is awkward—very—but Anne—well—she took an odd dislike to Nancy—and your *protégé*. It seems that Richards and she together discovered the unfortunate theft and, well——" he shrugged his shoulders, and his sister gathered that she must ask no further.

" But Jack must not die—of course ! " she said resolutely. " I have already sent off a mounted messenger to David, and he will get into touch with the authorities. A petition has, I hear, been started for signature, for somehow my poor Jack has collected about his gay person a wealth of love and admiration. I am riding off myself almost immediately, to get some

influential signatures. Public opinion is coming round against such monstrous punishment."

Peter looked at his sister with a strange envy. Why had he lost this strong spirit which moves in the right direction when movement is necessary?

"Peter!" she went on passionately. "What a cruel world it is. What have we done with our hearts—our souls? When I was in the jail just now with poor Jack——"

"You went?" His flushed cheek paled.

"Of course! When the child stood before me in his chains, asserting his innocence, with that proud toss of his head, he reminded me of you, Peter. One day you stood out against father—for some theft. I forget what now."

"And I lied," he said quickly.

He was thankful that a servant came in and announced that a man, Henry Vipond, wished to speak to him.

"Bring him in; you don't mind, Mary?" asked Sir Peter.

"Oh no—he may have come about Jack."

The blacksmith entered, and, set at ease by Mary, he was soon eagerly explaining his story.

The petition was going well, for every one loved Jack, and dozens were working from house to house.

"You see, sir," he said apologetically to Sir Peter, "I seem to have taken to John Wolfson's son, same as if he were my own, and it was all out in court that he wanted them buckles for my daughter Kitty. Kitty is fairly broken-hearted, and she can't deny that he did tell her a queer story about giving some to her. But what was inside that lad's fanciful head, God only knows. But suppose we could get him off—he would be transported."

"Oh Peter—that is dreadful enough," said Mary pitifully.

"Aye—there's a bit of me that wants the lad to be hanged—safe and clean!" admitted Vipond. "You see, sir—I have been transported—your honour will remember the enclosure riot—when you won—and we went down?"

Sir Peter flung himself back with a sudden nervous impatience.

"Tell me," said Mary quietly.

"Well, madam, I was skilled and steady—I made a bit out yonder, and if I went back there now, I could make some more. You know, or perhaps you don't know, that the convicts, the better end of them, are assigned to the settlers

as servants, and I was thinking, madam, that suppose we can get Jack transported, I could go out in the same ship as a free settler, and his honour could make sure that he was assigned to me as my servant when he got out there."

Again it flashed across Peter's mind that Providence had wondrous ways of coming to his aid.

"It is often done, your honour—this assigning—when there's a lump of money and influence. I have but little money, and no influence, and so I have come to you, sir."

"Oh Peter!" exclaimed Mary, "there is, of course, no question but that we could provide the money—and the governor of Port Jackson married our cousin—you remember?"

"Yes," muttered Sir Peter.

"And there's another idea I have, sir," urged Vipond. "Poor Joe Tempest—him that is to be transported for leading the rioting, is just broken-hearted about Jack. For a guinea the jailer let me see him. He had taken to Jack as though he were his own, now that he has lost his grandsons down the pit."

"Well?" said Sir Peter hardly.

"I was thinking, sir, that if you could see to it that Joe and Jack went out as convicts in the same ship, Joe could take charge of Jack and save him from the—the devilry, sir!"

Sir Peter was swift enough to see the irony of the situation. The man whose grandsons had been murdered in his pit was paying the penalty of a grandfather's indignation by transportation to hell; yet this man was unconsciously heaping coals of fire by playing protector to his own son.

Why could he not break his bonds and set himself free?

"You see, sir," urged Vipond, not understanding Sir Peter's silence, "the lad is doing no good round here, and God only knows, if the war goes on, how wages will drop and the food rise. Out yonder there might be a chance for him. In four years he would have his ticket-of-leave. Jack is smart and a fearful reader, and he might turn into a schoolmaster or a big man of some sort. So if you could help, sir—well—I give you my hand that I would do my best for the lad."

It was Mary who seized the blacksmith's hand with firm grip.

"I am sure that God has sent you to us," she said steadily.

After Vipond had left, Mary looked at her brother.

"You think it can be done?"

"It must be done," he said, and, wrenching open the French window, he passed out into the air.

XX

FOR JOHN WOLFSON'S SON

"KITTY, lass!" said Vipond to his daughter, a few days later, "I have summut to say to tha."

They were staying with Nancy, and Kitty was rejoicing at being Nancy's lass, learning household ways, and proudly enjoying her wonderful days of freedom. Yet the sad burden of her thoughts ever turned to Jack; for was it not Jack who had given her her first gleam of happiness, and was it not for her that he was to-day suffering in such agony of suspense?

Kitty laid down her brush and sat down with her father on a rude bench outside the cottage.

"Suppose, lass, that they were to send Jack over seas, could thoo be content to bide here, along of Mistress Nancy, while I go over yonder to make sure that no harm comes to Jack?"

Kitty flushed, and her eyes moved restlessly.

"You mean—you would leave me again, and send me back to the workhouse and Adam Strong's mill?" Accustomed to frustration and disappointment all her life, there was a pathetic despair in her manner. Had it all been a dream from which Biddy or the mill overlooker was shaking her awake?

"Aye and nay, lass," said Vipond, tenderly enough. "Thou shalt never go back to the mill nor to the workhouse. But thee and me must think of John Wolfson. He died for the people, and if there is anything we can do to help Jack to live for the people, we mustn't begrudge the pain of it."

"Why, no!" said Kitty, scorning to admit her misery.

"And for thee, lass, Mistress Mary would see to it that neither thee nor Nancy should want for anything, and happen Bella Tempest, póor Joe's daughter, might come and help tha to mind the house. I've spoken to Mr. Dolling, and he is right willing to give thee a deal more education than thy poor father has ever had, and thoo will grow up into a fine lass, ready for Jack when he lands back again."

"But, father, why can't I go too?" she pleaded.

"Yonder is nowt of a spot for a young lass—why—if yon isn't Mrs. Ross."

Mary was certainly riding hard towards them, and there was news in her face.

"Where is Nancy?" she called.

Kitty rushed indoors and brought Nancy out, holding her steadyingly.

"Nancy—dear Nancy!" said Mary, leaning down, "our Jack is saved."

"Saved—and they will send him out—out—out into the west, where the sun sinks down into the night?"

"Nay, Nancy," said Mary gently. "Jack will go south, and here is a friend who will go with him, and I and my husband will go south and visit Jack and Joe Tempest, and one day—Jack will come home."

"Every morning and every night poor mad Nancy will watch and wait—but Jack will not come," and the old woman shook her head.

But Kitty had made her decision. She drew Nancy's face down to hers.

"I will be Nancy's Kitty, and you shall be my granny, and we will wait together for Jack to come home."

"Nancy's Kitty?" she repeated musingly. "Mad Nancy brings no luck to any!"

But Mary contradicted her cheerily.

"Nay, Nancy, it was you who brought the luck to me, when you saved my David's life—down by the old quarry!"

The jailer had blurted out the news to Jack bluntly enough, and the boy stood dazed and bewildered.

"So, little cock-chicken," said one of his fellows, "thou art not going to swing with us after all!"

"Nor cheer up the crowd with thy last song!" said the other condemned man.

"You understand," said the jailer sharply. "Transportation for seven years, and you go on the ship next week."

"The ship?" stammered Jack, for his lips were dry; "but please, sir—of your kindness tell me—can't I see my granny and Kitty before I go?"

"There will be plenty of folk to see you away, I'll be bound," he said with a good-natured laugh. He was wondering if Mrs. Ross would be coming again, and how much she would bring in her pocket.

XXI

THE WINNING OF THE FIRST INCH

Bishop's End colliery was still closed down. The colliers and their wives were sullen, and the rioting at Oldcastle and the Manor House had drawn together the masters from the surrounding collieries.

Vistas of loss and ruin, through the domination of the colliers, lengthened out before the mine-owners. To give way on the issues raised was to admit the deluge.

As the owners sat in conference, Sir Peter expressed himself in short, unsatisfactory sentences, or sank to silence and allowed the others to talk. His imaginative instinct would give him no peace, and when Lord Rawby boldly asserted that it was their duty to " put down the foot where it would crush the hardest," he cringed, even as he nonchalantly lighted a pipe.

His memory served him awkwardly likewise, bringing before him the faces of dead twins, and the confident words of Malcolm, that what a Mason promised to man or woman, he would surely perform.

So, when the final decision was about to be made, Sir Peter stood out for putting in the upcast shaft. The others in vain protested that the colliers would claim a victory, and that it would be wiser to break them to come in unconditionally. With an irritable obstinacy Sir Peter insisted, and, as in the pit concerned he held the giant share, the others gave way.

On the notice being posted, the leaderless men decided to waive the rest of their grievances. After all, they stood on very perilous ground, for to refuse to work put them under the law, to combine together put them under the law, and worst of all, their sheltering roofs, scarcely to be called homes, belonged to their masters.

In serious tones they spoke of news that had filtered through. Farther north, colliers with their wives and families had been turned homeless into the snow, and the doors of their houses nailed up, while the military stood on guard.

It was best to let well alone and grasp what single benefit was offered. Thus it might be claimed that the dead had won an inch or so in the industrial struggle on behalf of those who were to follow.

XXII

THE WAGGON

THE prison waggon started early on its journey to Liverpool. The assizes had collected eight convicts, including Jack and Tempest.

Public humiliation was the rule, whether by hanging, flogging, the pillory, or the village stocks. If punishment was a deterrent it was well to let the public see its full effect. But the custom worked two ways, for while publicity brought to some an added misery, to others it brought a curious sense of comradeship. The effect, indeed, was often the exact opposite from what the authorities desired. Condemned prisoners turned into the heroes and heroines of a stage hour, and sympathisers came in multitudes to watch them pass to their doom.

When it became known that the prison waggon was on its way, the people came rushing out into the public roads that they might offer smiles and greetings, farewells, food and tobacco.

Mary had made arrangements to meet the waggon some distance from Bracken Fell, and Jack, though gratified at the enthusiasm of his many friends, had looked in vain for the faces of those he most wished to see.

But an hour later he uttered a wild shout of joy.

Mistress Mary herself was driving towards them, in a chariot, with his granny and Kitty.

Such an important equipage must receive attention, and the driver pulled up and the guards waited deferentially.

Jack was even allowed to clamber down, weighted with his irons as he was, to kiss his granny and Kitty. The women and child clung to him, but all too soon the order came to move forward.

"Granny and me will keep the home waiting for you, Jack!" protested Kitty.

"And one day," laughed Jack, on his mettle not to break down, "thoo shall be Mrs. John Wolfson, Kitty!"

Mary laid her hand on the boy's shoulder, even as Sir Peter, unaware of what was happening, turned the bend of the road. He pulled up sharply, and his hands lost all power.

"God keep you, Jack," said Mary wistfully, "and may you return, one of God's true men, ready for God's great

service," and all saw that the beautiful lady kissed the boy-convict on the cheek.

Another passionate embrace of granny and Kitty. Then Jack was ordered back into the waggon.

Bravely he stood, watching as long as the group were in sight. Then he wiped away a trickle of blood from the wounding of his lips by his own white teeth.

As for Sir Peter, his hands obeyed him at last. He rounded and galloped recklessly away.

EPISODE III

(1819)

I

KITTY DECIDES THERE IS NO GOD

Mr. Dolling was ageing fast, and hints of dropsy worried him, but he had a faithful visitor in Kitty Vipond, or "Nancy's Kitty," as she was often called.

Kitty was twenty-five. A great age for so beautiful a girl to reach and yet be unwed.

Her deep blue eyes, her peach complexion, her wealth of golden brown hair, her merry laugh and her rollicking tongue had brought many a lover to her side. As Kitty had once been the queen of the workhouse, so now she was queen of the countryside. Luckily she aroused no jealousy amongst the other girls, for it was common knowledge that Kitty was remaining faithful to Jack Wolfson.

"Confound Jack Wolfson," was the thought of many a love-sick swain, for Kitty's angular girlhood had ripened, and it was hard for claimants to accept her invariable answer.

"Don't!" she would say with a deprecating shake of her head. "You know I am promised to Jack Wolfson."

Dolling looking with pride upon her one afternoon as she darkened his doorway, gave him her gay greeting, and promptly began unpacking some dainties from under a snowy napkin.

"'Tis over thirteen years since Jack went away, Mr. Dolling," she commented.

"Aye," said the old man. "Folk can't forget that!"

"But perhaps—who knows—by midsummer he may come?"

"God pray he may, lass, for we need all honest hearts in England to-day."

"Aye," and she lowered her voice, and her eyes shone. "There is an ever-growing movement amongst the people. The messages pass from mouth to mouth, from mill to mill—from pit to pit."

"I am getting too old, Kitty, for such work," he said, shaking his head. "I am glad you young ones go forward—and yet, like a hen with ducklings, I want to drag you back out of harm's way."

"'Tis trouble in front and behind!" and Kitty smiled. "As the Children of Israel found when they fled from their taskmasters!"

"Aye, aye," he admitted. "Wherefore cry ye unto me! Say to the Children of Israel that they go forward!"

"There!" she cried triumphantly. "We stick and stick—and then blame the Lord!"

"Well, well, as I've said many a time, 'the ways of the Lord are strange!'"

Kitty did not always worry to argue with her old master, nor to insist on the strangeness of the ways of blind men, who had but to open their eyes in order to see.

"When Jack went off with Tempest and thy father," moaned Dolling, "it all planned out so well. In four years he got his ticket-of-leave, and in another three he might have been home. And all the time 'prenticed to thy father, and getting a good education, and nothing to suffer more than is the common lot of the workers to suffer. And then——"

"And then——" Kitty's eyes glowed, as she kneeled on the hearth and laid a hand on Dolling's knee, "Jack went down to see the affliction of his brethren. Like Moses, he lost his temper, and asked to know the reason of what he saw—the horrible—horrible things!" and Kitty shuddered. "And so he was sentenced again. Two years in a penal hell—and five years assigned to a settler. If Mr. Ross and Mistress Mary had not gone out, he would never have got back to my father. They would have trampled him down into the filth of it all for ever."

"Aye, aye!" said Dolling.

"Well, it isn't God who makes the laws of Botany Bay. It isn't God who is making the white settlers jealous and suspicious of the convicts; it isn't God who makes the convicts so brutal, so beastly, as Jack admits they are, in their misery. I don't believe there is a God at all. I would rather there wasn't. Let there be just one big, bullying devil—and then—I will go and tear him limb from limb!"

"Eh, Kitty, I've feared that poor Nancy puts queer ideas into thy head!"

"That one was quite my own!" protested the girl.

"It has been a long time for thee to wait, lass!" he said testingly.

"Never a bit!" she said lightly. "And isn't there always plenty to do?"

"Aye," he admitted proudly. "Kitty mothers all Bracken Fell and knows all its secrets, and she will get herself into a mischief if she isn't careful."

"Careful!" her voice scorned. "Have you forgotten, Mr. Dolling, that I started in Strong's mill, where they opened my back, and ached my legs, and turned me sick for want of food? And now the mill has got every child within sound of the bell, because no father can earn enough to keep up his home. Strong can build Bracken Fell Hall, and put a nine-foot wall round the gardens, but when his 'hands,' as he calls them, petition or strike, or combine—you know what happens! And then Mr. Dolling talks of the 'strange ways of God.'"

Kitty rose and swung a case over her shoulder.

"Another picture you want to paint?" he asked.

"Aye, Mistress Mary has asked me to let her have a picture of the old quarry, where Mr. Ross was nearly done to death in saving John Wolfson and the workers," and with a cheery nod Kitty went off on her task.

David Ross had discovered that his wife's *protégée* possessed talent with her brush, and he had enjoyed helping her on from time to time, when Kitty had the rare treat of staying at Sandby, a quiet spot not far from Manchester, where the Rosses had pitched a summer camp.

Ross was pioneering steadily, both in his art, which he dared to make true, and through his wide-eyed sensitiveness to the social injustices around him. He was in close touch with the radical reformers, and had astonished even them by his quixotic expedition with his wife to Botany Bay and Van Diemen's Land in order to study penal conditions, and, incidentally, to cheer and help Jack and other unfortunate convicts whom he knew.

He had dared to publish bold statements of fact, enough to stir the blood of any generation able to look farther than the well-being of its own household.

Kitty's sketching, so unusual for any one in her class, was looked upon with indulgence by the countryside, for Kitty

was a " character," and was enhaloed by her connection with " Nancy's Jack," about whom legend was already weaving myths for the wonder of the children.

This afternoon Kitty realised that she would be executing a trespass to pass through a certain wood to the quarry, but the knowledge did not affect her determination to do what Mistress Mary wanted. There was another sacred spot to Kitty in this wood, and as she went along, she could not resist breaking off a spray of briar roses, which she wound round her straw bonnet, so that a little later she could peep at herself in the clear depths of a pool in memory of the boy who had once asked a little girl to be his wife. And now she was twenty-five. With a fury in her soul she hurried on to the quarry, and having chosen her position, she removed her bonnet and cloak, and revealed the wealth of her golden brown hair, some dressed high on her shapely head, some in ringlets which dangled about her face, as she moved in her work.

As she traced the outlines of her subject, her mind escaped to the tale Mistress Mary had told her, and her vivid imagination could reset the whole scene.

And all this had come about because men and women claimed to live on God's earth.

Kitty tossed her head, looked out into the distance, then fell to work and thought again. Great deeds had been done even in a past of twenty-five years ago. Yet times had grown more evil. The rich were richer, the poor were poorer. The war was over, and the poor found themselves betrayed, for wages were falling, bread was rising, and, illiterate and bewildered, they knew not which way to turn. If they raged over their troubles, if they discussed them together, if they petitioned, if they combined, only worse ills befell them.

Kitty's thoughts overcame her artistic endeavour, and she laid down her pencil..

None used the quarry now as a meeting place, yet still the people met, and still they talked of " some day." Yet it seemed always to be " some day," so Kitty thought bitterly. Ever the oppression of the many, the struggle of the few to protect and redress, the struggle of the other few to dominate. Must it always be thus ? Yet the many were so many, how was it that they did not win through ? How was it that so often the oppressed wearied out the hearts of those who would serve them ?

But suddenly Kitty leaped to her feet. A yell resounded from close at hand, as though some one were in mortal agony.

"Oh—that devil's trap!" she exclaimed.

Another instant and she was pushing through the undergrowth, puzzled where exactly to go, for the sound had ceased. No! Surely there was a moan. Something moved amongst the brambles.

"Oh, sir!" she gasped.

But Malcolm Mason did not answer. He had fallen, in his struggle with the great teeth of the man-trap, with his head against a tree. He was moaning unconsciously.

Kitty realised that she could not free him from the trap so long as he was unconscious, so she rushed off to a stream and, ripping her white petticoat, she soaked a strip of it, and dripped the water on the young squire's face. To her joy she saw that he was reviving, but she wondered whether she would have strength to open that terrible instrument of torture. The heavy boot might have saved him partially, but she feared that the wrenching had broken his leg. Happily the girl was strong and used to heavy work, and she managed to move the semi-conscious sufferer to a better position.

"Why—it is Miss Kitty!" he said faintly.

"Yes, sir. And now, sir, pluck up all your powers and lift out your foot when I pull back the teeth."

Kitty managed to draw back the teeth sufficiently wide to thrust in a block of wood, and the action caused Malcolm exquisite agony.

"Now, sir, I'll open it wider next time. I need both my hands, so you must pull out your foot yourself." She spoke with a dictatorial callousness, and Malcolm knew that he must obey her.

So Kitty worked and Malcolm agonised. He was free, and Kitty let back the teeth with a horrible jar.

"Now sir, your knife!"

He handed it, and Kitty cut away his boot carefully, and revealed the mangled ankle. He looked at his foot, then into her eyes and laughed.

"Oh don't, sir!" she exclaimed, her eyes filling with tears, and rushing off to the beck, she returned to tear her petticoat to ribbons that she might staunch the bleeding and put the foot in a rough splint, for Nancy was famous for her nursing, and had taught Kitty much of her art.

"Why the devil, Miss Kitty, do we allow such things to lie in our woods?" he asked.

"They are illegal, sir, and every keeper knows it, and every master of every keeper knows it also!"

"Yes," he said thoughtfully. "Miss Kitty, have you had any news of Jack Wolfson lately?"

At the sudden question, Kitty flushed.

"Not very lately, sir."

"He was caught by a bigger trap than has caught me. I wonder you can look one of my family in the face—let alone minister to me as you are doing now."

"Jack set store by you, Mr. Malcolm," she answered him. "He thought that you were different."

"I see!" he said bitterly. "Well—I believe that if you would be good enough to bring my horse which I tethered to the gate, I might manage to mount. I can't stay here all night."

Kitty nodded, and having put on her bonnet and cloak, and collected her sketching things, she brought the horse.

"This will teach me not to go botanising in my father's woods!" he said grimly, as he sought to laugh off the pain of the mounting.

But Kitty aided him well, and she led the horse up a rough road towards the Manor House.

The going was painful, and conversation had died down, but presently they were overtaken by an elegantly dressed young man who, raising his hat, asked if he could be of any use.

"My name is Coldstream," he volunteered. "I have been at Bracken Fell Hall, and was about to pay a call at the Manor House. Your foot ought not to be hanging like that, sir. Allow me to walk close and support it."

"You are kind," said Malcolm. "I am rich in helpers. Allow me to introduce Miss Vipond."

Kitty turned, and gave a half curtsey in return for the stranger's bow, then led the horse on, for every care was needed to avoid unnecessary jolting.

She was thankful, indeed, when at last they reached the Manor House, and the injured man was lifted down by the anxious servants and carried within.

Kitty, having declined Malcolm's eager invitation to her to enter, was turning away, when Mr. Coldstream spoke to her with a simple politeness.

"It grows dusk, Miss Vipond. Allow me to see you home, for this accident would make my call an intrusion."

Kitty required no escort, but she instinctively felt it would be self-conscious to offer any fussy objection.

They walked on, therefore, towards the village for some time in silence, but at last Coldstream said abruptly:

"Horrible idea—man-traps! Time we put an end to all this kind of work."

"How?" asked the girl, somewhat startled.

"Nay," he said with a pleasant laugh, "you might denounce me as a seditious Jacobin, or whatever our noble Government calls the people who dare to tell the truth. I have the privilege of going up and down the country a good deal, and everywhere it is the same."

"What is the same?" she asked, interested in spite of herself.

"A want of common purpose in appreciating the weight of fetters," he said lightly. "The upper classes are fettered to their schemes, their diplomacies, their wire-pullings, their fears—the lower orders are fettered because—well——" he laughed, "if they could keep out of their beer shops and cock-pits and—however, I suppose one must have patience, and conclude that they know their own business best."

"Whom do you call the 'lower orders'?" asked Kitty.

"A very fair question," he admitted briskly, "and one that it is difficult for me to answer. You see, on my father's side I am of the lower orders—my father was a hand-loom weaver. My maternal grandfather was a gentleman—so called. Unluckily, for my stability, a small fortune gives me independence to roam as I will. In roaming I often find myself torn between my sympathy with the folly of the upper orders and my exasperation at the greater folly of the lower orders."

"You are, then—a mere piece of stretched rope, sir?" asked Kitty.

"Excellent!" he said, with a hearty appreciation. "And yet," and his voice changed to a moving intensity, "there are times when I feel that I must snatch away one end of the rope for good and all, and pull with my whole strength on the side of my father's class."

"'Tis poor work to feel and then—to stand," she said scornfully.

"There you have me arrowed," he said sadly, "I—who am a guest at Bracken Fell Hall!"

"Then—you know Mr. Adam Strong?"

"He is an expert in old coins. So am I. We ride a pair of hobby-horses."

"Hobby-horses! When the poor——" the girl stalked on a pace or two, but he caught her up.

"I gather Mr. Strong is the tyrant of this neighbourhood, by the extent of his mill buildings. He certainly does not lack in frankness, for he was pouring out to me the tale of his spinners' and weavers' contendings last autumn."

"Mr. Strong is frank at times, and confidential!" said Kitty with a bitter laugh.

"I fear I was not so confidential! But I am a sad coward—I confess it. Yet my blood boiled at the way he spoke."

"And then you took off the pan?" scoffed Kitty. "Yonder light shines from our cottage, sir. I am one of the lower orders—whose blood retains its boiling heat. I wish you a good evening," and in an instant his companion had disappeared.

Coldstream took off his hat that the night air might cool him, and only slackened his pace as three men loomed darkly in the roadway.

"I heard a squeal a bit ago, Richards—hope you got something hot in that trap?" said a voice.

"Lord—Mr. George, do you know who sprung that trap?"

"I certainly did not look!"

"It was the squire's son, sir. Our own Mr. Malcolm."

George Strong, the heir to the mill-owner, stood back, and in doing so, collided with Coldstream.

"I beg your pardon—who is it?"

"My fault—altogether!"

"Oh—you!" said the young man, and he drew him aside out of hearing of the distracted keepers.

It was evident they were well acquainted, for they spoke in low, eager tones, until Coldstream, pausing at a cross road, prepared to separate.

"But I thought you were staying with us?" objected George Strong.

"On the whole, I fancy I shall understand the lower orders better, if I take up a humble lodging at the 'Fur and Feathers,'" he said.

"Confound the lower orders!" said Strong testily.

"Quite so—but don't do it so loud!" suggested the other. "Times are dangerous!"

"Confound the times, then!"

"Quite so—again! Oh—and by the way, who is the Miss Vipond I had the pleasure of escorting down the road just now?"

"One of the lower orders."

"So she informed me, but—what is her story? Why isn't she married?"

Strong gave a laugh.

"The wind in that direction? I understand she keeps her grey hairs in readiness for some overseas lover. She is in all the mischief there is, and if there isn't enough, she manufactures it."

"Keen on sailors?"

"No—keen on some damned convict—Botany Bay—name of Wolfson."

Coldstream managed to wish good-night with his usual graceful ease. Then he walked on with gripped hands and bowed head.

The luck was running strong that had brought him to Bracken Fell and district.

II

BY THE CHIMNEY CORNER

NANCY was growing weary of waiting for Kitty. Kitty ought to have been home long ago. On the other hand, to blame Kitty was impossible, for Kitty was perfect—always perfect. Nancy could not have argued about it, but it was her predominating thought.

And now, not caring to light a candle, she sat back, watching the flickering of the fire, and allowed her poor mind to wander.

And strange visions came to her, making her speak out from time to time, as though the ghosts of the past were in that kitchen. It was queer familiar talk, such as Kitty had of late years listened to, with an eerie quiver in her heart.

But to-night memory grew clearer, until suddenly Nancy sat very upright, looking at John Wolfson, as he stood in the

hands of the press gang—there—by the dresser. Yes—yes—but—Nancy clasped her head in her hands. She had reached the old, old point where she always forgot.

She sank back again. But was that John Wolfson's voice, speaking so strong and steady?

"I have sealed this package, Nancy, and I want you to give it to Jack when he is full-grown," the voice died away.

Nancy staggered up, clung with one hand to the chair, and flung out the other to the darkness.

"Poor mad Nancy has remembered," she muttered.

She felt her way by the furniture to an oak chest. She tried to raise the lid, but it was too heavy for her failing powers and she had just sunk down on the floor, when Kitty's signal whistle was heard, and an old dog rose. Kitty entered and peered into the darkness.

"Why granny?" Her voice was alarmed, as she looked towards the empty chair.

"Kitty! Kitty, lass! I remember!"

Kitty lighted a candle and went over to the corner and kneeled:

"What do you remember, granny dear?" she asked tenderly.

"What he gave me! John Wolfson has been here to-night, Kitty. He told me—as I sat in yon chair—and now—poor mad Nancy remembers."

"Come back to thy chair, granny!"

"Not till thoo has opened yon chest," she said obstinately.

Kitty, to humour her, supported her to a stool, then opened the chest and lowered the light towards the tumbled contents.

"What shall I bring out, granny?"

"'Tis my red silk neckerchief. Be sharp, child!"

Kitty turned over a quantity of old-time rubbish. She now remembered that she had noticed a red neckerchief knotted together, and at last, spying it, she brought it out.

"Here it is, granny!" she cried triumphantly. "Now—let me take you back to the fireside."

For some time Nancy fumbled with the neckerchief, and whatever it might contain. Kitty did not hurry or worry her, but drew down the kettle. She noticed that her granny took out a worn leather case. From this she drew a package, which she handed to Kitty.

" There it is, lass ! There's summut on it, but thoo kens I can't read."

Kitty's curiosity was thoroughly aroused, as she turned the writing to the light.

" To Jack Wolfson, when he is grown up. From John Wolfson."

Kitty turned it over. It was closed with wax and a heavy thumb had been used as a seal.

" 'Tis for Nancy's Jack when he is grown up," said the old woman dreamily.

" Aye, granny."

" Jack takes a long, long time to grow up, Kitty."

" Aye, granny ! " To her consternation, Kitty found her lips trembling.

" Whisht ! "

Kitty waited, for when her granny said " Whisht " some trance-vision usually followed. Kitty nerved herself to the futile pathos of it all.

" The sea ! The sea ! Can't ta hear the breaking of the waves ? " But Kitty could hear nothing save the beating of the night wind against the tree tops.

" He is coming ! John Wolfson's son ! See, lass ! " and she reached out a trembling hand towards the window. " Light ! Light ! Where Nancy's Jack comes there is light—and a song ! " And to Kitty's amazement, her granny began to sing in a cracked, yet musical, voice, a few strains from " Cherry Ripe." Then she broke into a wild " Ha ! ha ! ha ! " which Kitty had not heard for years. Did this mean something or nothing ? But Nancy quietened down, sat back limply, and Kitty, after making her a cup of tea and chatting of small, insignificant matters, put her to bed.

When at last alone, Kitty turned the letter over and over. What secret did it contain ? Then she tied it up in the neckerchief, as though it were a sacred thing and returned it to the chest.

Suppose Jack never came back ? Suppose—— Kitty unlocked a drawer and took out a packet of letters. She read them, one by one, between long intervals of fire-gazing, until startled by the dawn.

" Jack ! You are no dream ! " And Kitty smiled.

III

THE WIND FROM THE NORTH

THE trading ship had been becalmed for a fortnight, but at last she was moving, tacking against the springing wind from the north.

Two men were lounging against a coil of rope in the bows, but presently the younger one rose restlessly and leaned over the rail, where the dashing spray eagerly took its chance to glisten his bronzed cheeks.

"After all, Vipond," said Jack with a laugh, as he turned, "I had rather feel the wind in my face and struggle against it, than endure the eternity of calm we have had."

Vipond puffed lazily at his strong tobacco, and looked at the speaker thoughtfully, wondering what his daughter Kitty would think of the man he was bringing back to her.

Jack looked his age of twenty-six, but his stormy youth had shaken him as a sapling oak is shaken, knitting his frame to power, in preparation for all the storms yet to be.

His curling hair was thick, but streaked with grey, his clean-shaven face was lined ruggedly, but the laughter-lines crossed the care-lines inextricably. For Jack had learned to laugh where others cursed, and to curse where others laughed, and his cool, deep-seeing eyes pierced life with the old boyhood wonder of the eternal "Why?"

"My old granny used to say that 'Dead fish swim down t' stream. It takes a wick 'un to swim up!' I have thought that I must have been born in a storm, when the gale was howling about my father's cottage."

"Jack! Kitty is twenty-five. Suppose she has lost her good looks, her youth, her——"

Jack's eyes flashed merrily, as he drew from his breast a small packet of letters.

"Kitty is in these letters. The very soul of her—big and brave—and see!" He drew out a tiny water-colour sketch—a masterpiece in its way, by David Ross.

Vipond had seen it before, but he looked at it greedily. His daughter was there, with blue eyes and golden brown hair and the mischievous smile about her mouth. Jack put it back into his pocket.

"You want to tell me that this picture is seven years old? Well, if Kitty is as plain as my poor granny——" He flung

himself down again, " Why, man, the boot is on the other leg. Kitty—my wife—God in heaven ! Let her know the worst. A convict ! Fourteen years since they tore me away. I can see the old tree in the road—where she stood—and I in that cart—with my hands and my feet in irons—staring ! "

Jack flung out his arms as though daring to support the very heavens.

" To be free ! To be my own master at last ! " Again he leaped up. " I wonder if that tree still stands ? See Vipond, the north wind is in my hair ! Who knows but what it has already kissed her cheeks ? "

" 'Tis poet and scholar you should have been, lad ! And instead, God sent you into the wilderness ! "

Jack looked at the speaker curiously.

" Long ago, Mistress Mary told me to be one of God's true men. I think it is she who has kept my soul from turning to ice—or hell fire. I used to think it all out as I worked, with the chains eating into my flesh, the hunger gnawing at my vitals, and at night—the stench. If God is general of this campaign, who are we—privates—to question His plans ? Poor old Master Dolling ! I wonder if he still lives ? He used to tell me the old story of Moses—found on the water—sent to deliver his brethren from the taskmaster. Moses went wrong at the start, and was sent into the wilderness for forty years ! I am only twenty-six ! "

" And what shall we find in England ? " mused Vipond. " Seemingly the taskmasters are hard at work, perhaps harder than in Botany Bay, for at least the free settlers are free."

" In England, men, women and children with the hunger gnawing, build, not homes for themselves, but great places for their taskmasters. When I think of what Kitty has written to me, I have wished that our good old Quaker, Nathaniel Winterbottom, had not set my conscience so awkwardly at work. Still—if ever violence could turn men into angels, it had a chance in Botany Bay."

" The world is never keen to see folk turn into angels ! " said Vipond grimly. " It is content if it can play the devil without getting over much of the devil's pay."

" Aye—the sword of the spirit, sharper than any cat-o'-nine-tails. God's naked truth, a flame to scorch away the world's mask."

"And when the mask is scorched away, he who holds the torch——"

Jack interrupted with a laugh.

"I—torch-holder to our friend Eustace Grimstone! I can testify that I got seven years for tearing off his mask, and showing up his traitorous countenance. I wonder where that smug fellow is smiling his smug smile to-day, and pouring out his cheap eloquence?"

"He knew his business," said Vipond.

"Fomenting rebellion amongst convicts, and then turning upon the poor devils to get his 'free pardon' as common informer!" said Jack disgustedly.

He drew out the portrait once more, and frowned.

"It is unbelievable that she can have waited fourteen years for a convict! Confound you, Vipond. Why are you dragging me back?"

IV

MALCOLM REMEMBERS

It appears to be a law of human nature, and, therefore, of God, that precisely to the extent that a man refuses to do the best he knows, he deteriorates, even though he may never know or acknowledge the crippling disease.

Sir Peter Mason had, some twenty-six years ago, entered "Bypath Meadow," and the alluring track had turned and twisted until he had lost all compass, and through the gathering storm he could hear the voice of Giant Despair shouting after his prey.

From being a sensitive man of the mode, cultured and artistic, and hating any hint of commerical struggle or political endeavour, he had re-created himself into a public aspirant, proud of his business instincts, and sanctioning them by the new political economy which drove the world forward to ruthless individual buccaneering, ostensibly for the good of the race.

At one time it appeared to be Anne who was driving him on, but Sir Peter had long out-Jezebelled Jezebel in his Naboth-destroying career.

Curiously, the terrible accident to Malcolm had filled him with unreasoning anger, not against his old keeper, Richards, who had set the trap, but at the poaching lower orders, who

had made the setting of man-traps necessary. When Anne, still comely, though carrying her years heavily, pestered him with wailing reproaches, Sir Peter turned on her with unwonted brusquerie.

"Nonsense, Anne! There was nothing blameworthy in setting the man-trap. What is wrong is that our Government fears to give us due powers against the thieving fraternity of poachers, who steal by night, and come whimpering to the parish in the morning, complaining of their wages. Gentlemen ought, I grant you, to have no need to defend their own woods."

Anne gave a light laugh, and being an expert at changing awkward subjects, started full swing on a description of a scheme for getting up a public sensation on Midsummer Night. She had already decided every detail with Lady Rawby, though she talked questioningly, as though the plan were still tentative in her own mind.

"But why Midsummer Night?" he asked without interest, for he was about to go up to see his injured son.

"Why," and she dropped her voice ominously. "I have been wishing to tell you the terrible news which Mr. Coldstream brings, as to the outrages which are preparing throughout the length and breadth of the country to take place on Midsummer Night. He was vastly put out at missing you, but I heard all he had to say."

Anne was apt to exaggerate "facts" so systematically, that Sir Peter did not immediately display the interest she felt she had a right to expect.

"Spinners, weavers, colliers—every trade—rising against their masters. Mr. Coldstream is going up and down the country giving the warning, and we must certainly do something about it."

"If Mr. Coldstream finds that this plot has reached Bracken Fell and Oldcastle, of course, we shall do something—hot!" he admitted in ragged temper, "but what in the earthly world has that to do with your scheme—and I suppose you have had it all over with Lady Rawby?"

"Peter!" she said with an aggravating sigh. "But there—men are so utterly without imagination. We ladies understand that in one respect, at least, the lower orders are like the upper classes. They are snobs at heart, and the old fable tells us that the sun will make a man throw off his coat sooner

than the wildest gust of wind. We have already undermined much opposition to enclosure and the rest of it, by our charities; by having what we call a 'stir' on Midsummer Night, with music and beacon flare and dancing and feeding, we shall—can't you see, Peter? We choke the agitators—pure business, as a business man like you should know!"

"I dislike buying off the Danes," he said coldly. "Personally, I should prefer an arrangement with the militia!"

"The militia!" she scoffed. "Who can trust the militia—when the lower orders dominate it?"

"Well, my dear Anne," said Peter, rising, "I know that you will do exactly as you like. But I must go and wish goodnight to Malcolm. It is most unfortunate that we should have been put under such an obligation to that impudent young female, whom Mary persists in supporting."

"Mary has been unfortunate in the young people she has lodged with that mad old woman," said Anne. "Send this Vipond creature a bit of jewellery and be done with her."

Malcolm's accident had been terrible enough, and had been followed by the anguish of amputation by the best surgeon available, and when his father came in, he found him suffering intensely.

"Come in, sir!" he said cheerfully. "Talk to me—in heaven's name!"

Sir Peter seated himself, and the nurse left the room.

"I have often told you that I was never cut out for being a baronet!" he went on, as his father could not think of anything to say. "You will have to make over some of the family livings to me. I might get into the pulpit with a crutch, and I have often thought I might preach a better sermon than old Lutterby."

"That would scarcely be difficult," said his father grimly.

"You haven't allowed me to thank Miss Vipond yet," he said, for still the conversation did not flow.

"Of course, if you wish——"

"I like her. We are friends," he said simply.

"I didn't know," said his father, frowning.

"You need have no alarm—it is no *grande passion!*" he said whimsically. "Kitty Vipond is safely betrothed out of harm's way. But we have one bond in common."

"And what the deuce——?"

"Her lover!" and Malcolm smiled. "She tells me about him. He has had a horrible—brutal time."

"But who?"

"Jack—Jack Wolfson, you surely remember, sir?" surprised at the sudden blankness of his father's expression.

"Remind me!" suggested Sir Peter. It was well that candle-light was not strong.

"The boy who stole Catherine's shoe-buckles, and was reprieved and sent to Botany Bay. Personally, I would rather have been hanged. What a glorious boy he was. He and I had more than one scrape together. He got a second sentence out there, and Kitty Vipond has waited faithfully all these years."

"She—this girl expects him back?"

"Yes, and I hope she won't be disappointed. Botany Bay isn't the sort of place to develop saints."

"No!" admitted his father.

"Nor is England, when one thinks of it!" said Malcolm smiling. "We seem to have struck a saintless age!"

"Every age protests likewise," said Sir Peter, struggling to carry on the talk, "but I must not keep you from your sleep."

"Sleep! Sir, suppose this carries me off—no, don't stop me, for there is always poisoned blood to consider; suppose it does—well—I haven't made much headway in life."

"You ought to have married, Malcolm."

"To beget an heir! Strange, sir, that one by one we make a mess of life, and then beget an heir to carry on! When will life become more than one long regret?"

"There is no one who does not regret something. It would be monstrous to expect it!"

"I have been looking at this queer little woodcut of Blake's," and Malcolm passed the quaint volume.

"Blake is mad," said his father testily.

"I am gathering that we are all mad," said the young man. "In the woodcut we see man, the midget, standing on the edge of the world, with his ladder set up towards the stars, crying out, 'I want! I want!'" Malcolm leaned back and gave an irrepressible groan.

"Leave Blake and his absurdities!" said his father. "You are in pain."

"It goes on! This pain in a few square inches of my flesh obliterates the pain of the whole world—even the pain in a penal settlement!" and he gave a wan smile.

"You need the nurse and sleep," and Sir Peter rose.

"You will see that Miss Vipond is sent for, sir?" Malcolm asked earnestly.

"I don't fancy your mother would like it," said Sir Peter evasively, "and I don't care to worry your mother."

"Of course," said Malcolm disappointedly, "I should not wish to worry mamma." He had grown accustomed to crossed desires.

V

AFTER THE DANCE

Sir Peter was fond of a night ride, and on this soft summer evening the air was alluring.

Malcolm's condition was troubling him, and he decided that he must get another opinion. Malcolm and Catherine were his only children, or at least Anne had borne him no others, and if anything happened to Malcolm what about the peerage he was expecting?

But it is fair to admit that it was not only the family tree which troubled him. In hours of exasperation Sir Peter admitted that his son created a relief from his wife's wearisome bickerings and his daughter's inanities. Malcolm was his own higher self—the Sir Peter he might have been, if—And then he forced away his thoughts with violence, terrified lest he should see brown eyes peering at him through the night.

Sir Peter's way lay through Bishop's End, for he was going to Rawby Castle, and in the gloaming the faint lights flickered from the dismal hovels. Here and there a collier's wife had thrown open a door for air, and children had not yet gone to their apologies for beds.

He was obviously recognised by a line of men who were on their way to the pit for the night shift, but no greeting passed.

"Surly dogs!" he muttered.

For in spite of the upcast shaft there was no peace.

Unremedied grievances kept the men sullen and cowed, and even spasmodic charity, in the shape of lumps of coarse beef or pieces of blanketing, was only received with obsequious thanks in view of favours to come. So soon as the donor was out of hearing, rough and awkward arguments passed amidst taunting mockery.

Feeling was mounting high regarding a school which had been opened to meet the needs of the growing population of tradesmen, farmers and others. Amongst some of the colliers, ambition stirred, for a pathetic belief in the school prevailed, as the way to freedom from the life intolerable. But hopes were beaten back. It was decided by the managers that no colliers' children were to be admitted.

No wonder, therefore, that Sir Peter received no greeting, and, as he passed a cottage from which streamed a more extravagant light, he noticed a woman being greeted by a group within.

" What the devil is that young woman doing at Bishop's End ? " muttered Sir Peter.

And the colliers, waiting for the cage at the pit head, also asked a question.

" Off to Rawby Castle for his champagne and cards ! What the devil does he care ? "

But it was neither champagne nor cards which were drawing Sir Peter to the Castle ; and somewhat later, a group of men gathered in the comfortable old library, plentifully supplied with drinks and tobacco, in order to take their ease and speak in confidence, so long as they cared to stay awake.

Lord Rawby played the host, with his son, the Honourable Dick, and he had invited Mr. Adam Strong, his son George, and Sir Peter Mason to meet a gentleman from London.

The little company was immediately prepossessed with Mr. Vincent Coldstream, for he neither presumed nor apologised, and it took but a few minutes for him to gather impetus in the telling of his tale.

Sir Peter was so accustomed to Anne's exaggerations and mare's nests that it had become a secret amusement to him to wager what modicum of truth there might be in her latest tales. He recognised also that she usually talked with an object, and he prided himself on his skill in determining, from what she said, the reality at the back of her mind. But to-night he was forced to the conclusion that there was more than usual in Anne's tale.

Mr. Coldstream was in serious mood, as he explained that the workers were expecting the signal for a general rising at the firing of beacons on Midsummer Night.

The delusion was working and magistrates were turning a

blind eye to any plottings they might suspect, so that they could strike hard when the hour came.

"And may I be there to catch these praters on reform and liberty red-handed!" exclaimed the Honourable Dick. "It is the cavalry these fellows want."

"Quite so!" agreed Lord Rawby. "We have had some awkward failures with the militia lately. Foot soldiers are no earthly good against a mob. They snatch their weapons and——"

"It is gentlemen, sir," interrupted his son, "who are needed in days like these."

"Precisely," said Coldstream, "and the Government relies upon you, gentlemen, in this district to root out the sedition."

"We shall not fail the Government," said Mr. Strong. "Why, confound it all, these ignorant fools cannot see that they are up against the established laws of the universe, discovered by our ablest economists. We must have freedom—perfect freedom! We are breaking the bondage of the old regulation of wages, by interference of magistrates and Parliamentary orders. The prosperity of the manufacturer and the landowner means the prosperity of England. We must insist on that great principle."

"Yet these spinners and weavers, sir," put in his son wrathfully, "have actually raked up an old law demanding that magistrates shall decide what is a fair wage. Parliament was wise enough to repeal it, so soon as it was brought to light. I fancy we are indebted to you, Sir Peter, for that piece of work!"

Sir Peter laughed deprecatingly.

"The responsibility of a Member of Parliament is always great," he admitted. "One has to be continuously alert against the machinations of so-called reformers, who never lose an opportunity, inside the House or out, of trying to shatter the constitution."

"I saw an odd advertisement in that monstrous rag, the *Manchester Observer*, the other day," said Lord Rawby—"some scoundrel was imploring one million weavers, spinners, colliers and the rest to subscribe one penny per week to buy up a few boroughs so that they might get their demi-gods into Parliament—Cobbett, no doubt, and Hunt and Cartwright, and the gods know who."

"Will they get it?" asked Major Dick. "A dashed revolution if the lower orders are to buy constituencies as if they were—well us!"

"The rising cloud of combination," said Coldstream oracularly. "One million pennies a week would go far. The idea is laughable to-day, but let it go on and—well, you see the storm signal, gentlemen?"

"You think there are damnable stirrings going on in this district?" asked Sir Peter.

"Difficult to judge—yet!" and Coldstream shrugged his shoulders.

"I wonder what that young woman, Vipond, was doing at Bishop's End to-night?" said Sir Peter. "I noticed her as I rode through the village."

"The young woman nurses the sick, Sir Peter!" said George Strong with a disagreeable laugh. "It is strange how the sick accumulate in certain cottages!"

Then they all drank heartily at Lord Rawby's invitation, and became extraordinarily confidential. Coldstream was, however, no drinker, and when at last he rose, his head was quite reliable.

VI

COLDSTREAM SCORES

It was, perhaps, fortunate that Mr. Vincent Coldstream's horse stumbled awkwardly on the shocking road which led to Bracken Fell.

It happened just as he noticed in front of him a group of three. They turned at the sound of the horse, and Coldstream dismounted.

"I wonder if I may join you?" he asked pleasantly. "I fancy my poor beast has wrenched his near foreleg, and I can't afford to have him go lame."

"Why—it is Mr. Coldstream!" said Kitty, and there was an undoubted interest in her voice.

The danger to the impulsive, generous-minded nature is, that while, in the long run, it achieves more than the cautious and the suspicious, it is liable to temporary catastrophe, brought about by its own superb optimism.

Kitty had entered with her whole soul into the people's struggle, so far as she could understand it. She had minis-

tered to the starving and visited the sick and imprisoned. She had raged with impotent fury against wrongs, and she had been careless as to the words she used to flash out her meaning.

But through her soul-travail she had experienced a desolating loneliness. In Nancy, of course, she had no true companionship. Dolling's years and prejudices handicapped perfect sympathy, while amongst the down-trodden workers Kitty felt a responsibility of leadership which she knew she was not entirely competent to carry. More than once lately she had been scared at the way her word was taken as the law of action. Kitty was undergoing that sense of oppression which afflicted the prophet who believed that he alone was left in the land.

No wonder, then, that the few words she had had with Mr. Coldstream had struck upon her refreshingly. Here was some one, out in life, who understood what was going on up and down the land, and who was conscious of the universal wearing of fetters. Though educated and a gentleman, he had had no compunction in confessing that his father had been of the toilers. He had even admitted that the world, as it existed, made his blood boil, and it was quite likely that he was one of the radical reformers, of whom Mistress Mary always spoke so respectfully.

On this particular evening in the collier's cottage, Kitty had battled against a despairing spirit of acquiescence in what was. Kitty, feeling such a spirit too dangerously in tune with her own, had nerved herself to her most optimistic mood. She had taunted them to action, to resolution and determination. She pleaded passionately that, for the children's sake, men and women had no right to lie down under the foot of tyranny, and at last they had agreed to support the proposed General Enrolment in one great union, of all workers throughout the country.

Yet even as they agreed, they doubted, and Kitty felt her temper rising against their doubt.

"Mistress Kitty," pleaded one of the men, "every word you say is gospel truth, but think on that we are chained to the front of the wheel, and if we stop we are under!"

"If you men won't, then we women will have to move," she said rather hardly. "If my granny did not need me, I would stump the country to gather the millions together."

"And you wouldn't stump far, mistress, afore the Combination Giant had gripped you in his jaws."

As she walked home, escorted by two of the men, the wind blew to a coming storm, which made Kitty's escort suggest hurry; and even as Coldstream edged himself and his horse to walk alongside Kitty, a low rumble of thunder was heard, and the soft radiance of summer lightning illuminated the sky.

Coldstream greeted the lightning with a laugh and a wave of the hand, and Kitty appreciated the mood. To her a thunderstorm was sheer joy, which set her whole being tingling with a stimulation which lifted her far above the present.

"Aye, we are in for a storm, surely!" said one of the men.

"Yes, our poor country must suffer the storm before she wins the peace!" said Coldstream.

Again there was a flash, and the thunder crackled nearer.

"Peace comes—when we lie down in our graves!" said one of the men scornfully.

"But why lie down? Why not stand upright?" asked Coldstream.

"Some folk has no right to stand up on God's earth—only to be buried in it. They'll soon be begrudging them a spot for t' worms to get a quiet feed at 'em."

"You are a wit!" laughed Coldstream. Then a nearer tumult of thunder drowned all speech. "If only to-night were midsummer night!"

"But why?" asked Kitty.

The rough road made it impossible for four to walk abreast. The colliers dropped behind.

"Surely you must know?" he said insinuatingly.

Here was a surprise, and Kitty did not wish this man to think she was ignorant of common news.

"One day I will tell you," he said, as she did not answer. "Only remember that Midsummer Night is the night of freedom, when the long, long struggle breaks to victory. As the light springs from hill to hill and flashes forth the news that——"

A terrific burst of thunder followed a dazzling flash, which made the horse prance nervously.

"Good lad! What is there to fear in a storm?" and he patted the horse's neck soothingly.

"You think that also?" she asked.

"All great souls enjoy a storm! I should guess, Miss Vipond, that storm is meat and drink to such a spirit as yours."

"I don't know," she mused.

"You know the rhyme that is quickening the souls of men?

'Midsummer Night is the People's Night,
Ere the red, red dawn appears!'"

They had reached the end of a lane which led down to Nancy's cottage, and Kitty stopped.

"Good-night, friends!" she said. "Get back—all of you, in case the rain follows. I am but a hundred yards from my home."

The colliers wished her good-night, and she thanked them cordially for their escort.

"And I wish you a good evening, sir," she said, turning to Coldstream. "Your horse will be thankful to find himself stabled."

Again a vivid flash, and Coldstream saw the excitement in her face.

So this girl was Jack Wolfson's betrothed.

"I must see you safely for the last hundred yards!" he said quite decidedly, and somehow Kitty did not prevent him.

They walked down the broken pathway in silence, but as they came up to the cottage, Kitty turned.

"What did you mean just now—exactly?"

Coldstream paused. It was as well that his listener's curiosity should reach boiling point.

"On Midsummer Night, when the people rise throughout England at the beacon signal and claim their own, let not Bracken Fell sleep. I—a poor messenger—would hand on the torch, and I am proud that it is my duty to pass it on to a woman."

The words were so in tune with her evening's struggle, that Kitty's mind was ripe to receive the subtle flattery. And yet—a life's training in caution held her leashed. He bit his lip suddenly, as Kitty sent forth a shrill whistling signal to her granny, which penetrated the grumbling of discouraged thunder.

The cottage door opened instantly, and Nancy stood, holding on to the lintel. The electrical disturbance had

nerved her, and a flicker of lightning showed her pale and excited. Stepping forward, she raised her hand and pointed towards the horizon.

"Midsummer Night!" she quavered. "See—the Lady of Bracken Fell rides round the people's common! See—the corn stack flames as she gallops—gallops—gallops—The people's common has been stolen. Tell me!" and she stared at Kitty and her companion, "where they have put it?"

"Come, granny," said Kitty, putting a hand on her arm. "I have kept tha up far too late."

"The Lady of Bracken Fell will come again—and woe—woe—— Who is yon man with yon horse?"

"A friend of mine, granny."

"Many friends, and never the one comes who should come," she grumbled. "Let me have a sight o' thy face, good sir."

"Humour her!" said Kitty, under her breath.

Nancy drew him towards the door, so that light might flicker about his face.

"Ha! ha! ha!" she suddenly shrieked. "Risen from the dead! The devil!" and she struck the amazed Coldstream violently in the face.

"Oh, sir!" cried Kitty. "Go—my poor granny is not always responsible!"

"The devil! The devil! All Grimstones are devils! Ha! ha! ha!"

But Kitty forced her into the cottage.

"Good-night, sir!" and closing the door, she locked it.

Coldstream mounted, and the last of the lightning flashed in his face.

He struck his horse violently, and rode recklessly along the shockingly kept road to the "Fur and Feathers." It did not appear as though the lameness of his horse were serious.

But, as the tingle in his cheek cooled, he smiled into the darkness. After all, he had scored. He had sowed a seed. Seeds grow.

But within the cottage, Kitty had some difficulty in treating her granny with her usual patience, and Nancy was shrewdly aware of the girl's mood.

"Thoo is vexed, lass, that I should strike t' devil when I get him close?"

" Granny, I told you he was a friend of mine ! " said Kitty severely.

Nancy looked at her, puzzled.

" He is a Grimstone—and all Grimstones are devils. Didn't I see the way his eyebrows curled upbank ? "

Kitty shook her head hopelessly, as she got the supper.

" Kitty, lass ! " said her granny with a meek anxiety to appease, " On Midsummer Night the Lady of Bracken Fell will ride round the common. She will leap the fences and break down the barriers. I can hear the smashing of the wood. Ha ! ha ! ha ! the common—She has won it again for the people ! "

Kitty listened. A strange thought came to her. Why should not she be the Lady of Bracken Fell ? Why should she not, on this fateful midsummer night, lead the people in triumph round the old boundary ?

VII

SANDBY STUDIO

David and Mary Ross had, as the years passed, turned the studio at Sandby into a haven of welcome for such as were breast foremost in the struggle for progress and liberty.

David's art had gained a public appreciation, sufficient to free him as to his subject matter, and he was now tearing down masks and forcing his generation to see the sordid conditions lying behind the flashing of luxury, culture and military power which blighted his day.

It was a sweet June afternoon, when David and Mary found themselves happy in entertaining a guest of some distinction.

Henry Hunt was a man of kaleidoscopic personality. He was hated, loved, feared, despised, and it was recognised by his truest friends, that his own impulsiveness and vanity dogged his steps and blocked his road. Yet his conspicuous courage in furthering his ideals and fighting down opposition won for him a remarkable influence, and now, at the age of forty-five, his energy was unabated. He had not yet attained his ambition of a seat in Parliament. That must come, he knew, if the people were to be served. He had now arrived at Sandby, ostensibly for a rest, but Hunt was no man to rest,

and David and Mary listened with deep sympathy as he poured out his scheme for the great Reform demonstration in Manchester. In their thousands from the north and surrounding districts, the people were to be invited to assemble to demand universal suffrage, vote by ballot, annual Parliaments, and repeal of the hated corn laws.

It was to be such an undertaking as should make the whole nation think, and Hunt, who conceived and sought to carry out his schemes with lightning rapidity, was restless, talkative and consumed with his quaint humorous egotism which his host and hostess so sympathetically understood.

For while Hunt's detractors taunted him with ambition and egotism, his friends realised that his egotism was never selfish, and that Henry Hunt shrank from no personal risk, and was wont to sacrifice his own interests with a recklessness verging on folly, if such sacrifice could serve an individual, or the true good of his country.

David's cartoons, showing the sordid conditions of the toilers, gave Hunt immense delight, and roused him to "good talk," in which, it must be confessed, he took the lion's share.

"I tell you," he said dogmatically, "during the war, England, the most credulous of all nations, has been mad-drunk with her own ignorance and folly. As my good tutor, Carrington, used to argue, 'Tis an error all honest men must deplore, that of resorting to brute force instead of relying upon truth, reason and justice.'"

"Still," said Mary whimsically, "I remember, Mr. Hunt, you told us of a certain young man who was as crazy as the rest to join the yeomanry!"

"True enough!" he said with a boy's joyousness, "and they said I was a wonderful acquisition. But—heavens—my old father was right when he said that nine out of ten had no motive other than self-interest, for they enlisted at the command of their landlord or of some other in power. My father always wanted England to manage her own affairs, do justice to the people, and leave the French alone. I can see his eyes as he said: 'Do justice to the people, and then we need not dread France nor all the foreigners in the world put together.'"

"And now the war is over—what have we?" asked David.

"Aye, what have we? Thirty years now since my tutor said to me: 'We want equal justice, equal political rights.

All that the people require to make them free and happy are equal laws, which we never shall have, so long as the present corrupt system lasts.' "

"The difficulty is," said David thoughtfully, "that no society has yet been constituted and organised on the genuine public principle of security and happiness of the whole community."

Hunt threw himself forward.

"And what can you expect?" he demanded, "when two hundred members sit at Westminster, with but a hundred electors apiece behind them, and when over three hundred and fifty are sent there by the will of a hundred and fifty wire-pulling and place-seeking patrons? I tell you, Ross, nothing makes me so despair to-day, as the way in which the wretched people are deluded into rioting and consequent horrors. We ought to be leading them in all sobriety to demand the vote—which will bring the power——"

"The vote seems a long road round, when the children wail for bread and a few hours' play," said Mary sharply.

"I know!" and Hunt frowned. "But I have suffered some hard knocks in seeking to save maddened men from the gallows. The cursed Press delights to delude the people into thinking that anything and everything is the reason for the high prices, save the true one. At least I can praise myself in this. I have often checked disaffection, but I have never mocked at misery. When in the yeomanry, it was openly admitted that we were there to keep up prices and keep down wages—to subjugate the labourer and thrust his dissatisfaction down his own throat. The main object of my officers was to secure their corn ricks and keep up the price of grain—and yet," and he laughed jovially, "they couldn't even fight!"

"I have noticed the parade that Major Dick, Lord Rawby's heir, makes of his accoutrements!" and Mary smiled, "but whether at the critical moment——"

"Heavens, and you are right, Mrs. Ross!" interrupted Hunt eagerly. "When we were ordered to Salisbury to quell a riot, the making of wills was the best trade going that week. A cornet had been insulted, and we were to show what we thought of Salisbury. But when the hour came, our noble captain shouted, 'Damn the cornet, let him get out of his scrape as best he can,' and straightway he went off for his health to Boreham. 'Gone to Boreham!' was a favourite

phrase amongst us youngsters in the regiment. My father used to call the yeomanry 'Old women-frighteners!' To ride down a crowd of women and children was about all they were fit for."

But Mary was scarcely listening to Hunt's babbling reminiscences, for she was watching two men, who stood first at the garden gate, then walked slowly up the path. Suddenly she sprang up with a glad cry, and it was the younger of the two who doffed his hat, sank to one knee and kissed her outstretched hand.

"Mistress Mary!"

"Jack! And Mr. Vipond!" and Mary greeted the older man warmly.

David followed into the garden to give his greeting, and in an instant there followed a torrent of explanation and excitement. Mr. Hunt was introduced, and, indeed, it was good to welcome such guests, and for such guests to receive such a welcome.

"We have come," said Jack, "to find out how England does, and how we may help her?"

His strong unselfconscious manner appealed to Hunt. Here was a man.

"Your purpose is big," he responded.

"Unless life be big," said Jack, "it would be better to be buried at four cross roads! But—tell us all we would know!"

And Hunt readily took his innings to set forth his scheme of the great Manchester Reform meeting, into which the guests entered with eagerness.

"It is up to us," declared Hunt at last, "to force the Government to the knowledge that the people are maligned when Press, magistrate and spy murmur 'sedition.' The people are not at bottom seditious. They are hungry, discouraged, hopeless, despairing. Give them the vote—give them a voice in the making of England—then——" he waved his hand above his head triumphantly.

"And when they have the voice," said Vipond cautiously, "how many generations will it take to teach 'em to ask for the right thing?"

"One step at a time, Mr. Vipond!" said Mary, smiling deprecatingly.

"And a stride great enough for our generation," said David. "For look you, reform must be carried in the very

teeth of the privilege it is out to destroy—nay, by the very privileged themselves."

"I hope you may have me for a recruit, sir!" said Jack modestly, "after I have——" he broke off shyly.

"We want such young stuff as you, sir," he said cordially. "We older folk forget how time flies with us. Why, it seems but yesterday since, all on one day, I won a lace cap for wrestling, buckskin breeches for jumping in sacks, an old cheese for bowling, and eleven half-crowns for cricket—and—yes—a dance with the fairest damsel at the fair!"

"I should not compete with such prowess!" admitted Jack with a laugh.

"And what think you," went on Hunt, as his memory allured him, "of getting out of my window at ten to go to a dance, and returning in time to pull away the ladder, before my father called me at four in the morning?"

The men were evidently finding one another good company, but as Jack talked, Mary watched him curiously. Of whom did he remind her? Not in his most eager moments, but when he threw himself back listening. She fought against an amazing idea. Then Jack played restlessly with his hands.

Why—of course—Peter played with his hands like that. How often she had chaffed him on the trick. But—the idea was monstrous. Her cheeks flushed—she rose restlessly—sank down in a distant corner of the studio, and fell into such deep thought, that she missed the conversation and only awaked as Jack said:

"But whether John Wolfson's son, convict, will be good enough for Kitty is a question yet in the lap of the gods."

VIII

MIDSUMMER NIGHT

So far north as Bracken Fell the night would never be really dark, and Nancy, alone in the cottage save for the ancient dog who still bore the name of Pup, was sitting listlessly, with her knitting lying neglected in her lap.

But presently she went to the door, and the old dog rose with her and almost immediately cocked his short tail at motionless attention. Two men were pausing uncertainly in the lane. Nancy eyed them reproachfully.

" The Lady of Bracken Fell rides to-night when the beacon flares, and all good men and true follow her ! "

" And who is the lady, granny ? " asked Jack, coming closer. His whole being thrilled with agitation at the sight of this woman, aged indeed, yet bringing back the old, old days which belonged to another life.

Nancy's wits began to gather as she felt his hand on her arm.

" Dear old granny ! " said the young man quietly in the soothing manner he had learnt as a boy. " Why, Pup ? Is it really Pup ? " and he laid a hand on the dog's rough head.

The dog's tail began to wag like a pendulum which has lost its weight, as he pranced against the visitor.

" I do believe Pup knows me, granny ! "

" Why, it is Jack—grown up at last ! " she cried, throwing out her arms.

" Aye, granny ! " he said tenderly. Then he put an arm about her, led her back to the old chair, and kissed her.

" Jack—Jack ! " she murmured, gazing at him.

But the young man was looking about him in rapture.

" Why—there is my old mug I won at the fair—and the porridge bowl—and the old bed-warmer—Aye, granny, happen I am not really grown up, but just thy lad come home again ! "

" Come home again ! " she puzzled, " and no chains on thy wrists ? "

" No, granny. And see, I have brought Harry Vipond with me ! " and Vipond, came forward.

" Aye, Mistress Fodderty ! " he said in his big, genial tone. " And how goes it with my Kitty ? "

" Whisht ! " said the old woman. " 'Tis to-night the beacons flare from London to Carlisle. To-night the people rise. To-night——" Nancy stopped and laid hold of Jack's sleeve. Fear was in her eyes.

" He is a scoundrel—a snake—Kitty says he isn't, but I know ! "

" Who, granny dear ? " Jack motioned to Vipond to sit down.

It thrilled him to find Nancy the same as of old, incoherent, difficult to understand, and he remembered that when Nancy was most incoherent it was the more necessary to seek, by patience, to understand her.

"He has been—yon devil—many times with Kitty, to show her how to save the people and get back the common. And Kitty listens, and the fire comes into her eyes," she bent towards Jack, "Whisht! the devil—my dead lover—down in the quarry—Come, take me to where my dead lover lies——"

Jack sighed. His granny was worse than of old. But her next words startled him to closer attention.

"Kitty calls him Mr. Coldstream—but Jack—I know—Grimstone—the devil!"

Jack shot a look towards Vipond.

"Grimstone, granny?"

"Does ta think, Jack, I shouldn't know the man who killed my lover—when his eyebrows turn up like this?" and the old woman made a descriptive movement about her own eyebrows.

And then Jack and Vipond were sure.

"Aye, Jack," and Nancy whimpered. "It is Kitty who rides to-night when the beacon flares," and Nancy began a rambling story of which they could make nothing.

"See you, granny!" said Jack, "Vipond and I will go forth to see this lady ride, and bring her back to you."

"And Jack—tell Kitty not to shake her head and laugh when her granny tells her that he is a devil. How can Kitty know?"

But when the two men had left the cottage Jack turned on Vipond.

"And now—what does this mean?"

"That our friend Grimstone has found a way of making money again."

"But granny's lover?"

"His murderer's son," said Vipond, "or grandson. It matters not."

"Come, in God's name!" said Jack hoarsely; "but where shall we go?"

IX

QUESTIONS

Malcolm had been very ill. His wound had gone wrong, and anguish of pain, fever and drastic doctoring had cut him off from life as it was moving in Bracken Fell and Oldcastle.

He had no cause of complaint, for the servants could not do enough for him ; his father visited him in a constant pressure of anxiety, finding in the sick room a cooling shadow from outside heat ; his mother, who usually hated any illness save her own, exerted a devotion awkward and pathetic. Catherine, frivolous and self-seeking, felt a puzzling softening in her nature, and found time to read to the patient Scott's poems and the newly published "Waverley." True, she read in a hard, matter-of-fact, unrhythmic voice which set Malcolm's nerves quivering, but he took careful pains not to show his distress.

But on this Midsummer Day Malcolm had been carried to a couch in the window of his room. He was at last at ease in his body, and the June roses, peeping in upon him through the lattice, gave him a sense of peace and repose. After all, the world was very lovely, and God was very good.

There was a tap at the door, and Catherine came in, small, dainty, self-confident.

Malcolm's thoughts had been sufficient company for him ; but persistently mindful of the feelings of others, he gave his sister a welcoming smile, and asked the meaning of the news in her face.

"Well—I have done it!" she said a trifle defiantly, as she sat down and laid a hand on the rug covering his knees. "I am engaged to George."

"George Strong?" His tone was incredulous, but instantly he changed it. "I am glad—very glad, Catherine, if you are glad."

"I am twenty-three," she said hardly, not meeting her brother's anxious eyes. "Mamma has been so obvious all these years in throwing her lines, that the bigger fish have swum away—sheered off from Catherine Mason, daughter of a mere country baronet!"

"Catherine!" he remonstrated. It struck him that possibly his sister's biting tongue had stung a stream of suitors away.

"You live in a dream world!" and she shrugged her shoulders. "I fancy that is your destiny! But have you nerve for more news?"

"I must seek to take up life again," he said cheerily.

"Well—the inside truth is that George's father has beaten poor father. He has been created a peer of the realm. I

mean he has created himself a peer—out of yarns and bobbins. He is to go to Westminster to strengthen the hands of the Government in these critical and dangerous times ! " and her pretty mouth sneered.

" Extraordinary ! " broke out Malcolm.

" Not in the least," she laughed, " but sickening enough for father and poor mamma—unless they now set their lines, angling for an earldom. But possibly ' My daughter, Lady Bracken ' in robes and coronet will support mamma from further need of smelling salts, and she may bring herself to forget—conveniently—certain snubbings she has had on my poor behalf."

" But you are not marrying the peer ! " said Malcolm, trying to readjust himself.

" Not at the moment," she said carelessly, " but George assures me that his father cannot last long—something pretty horrible the matter with him."

The young man shrank. The world was not lovely after all.

" But, little sister, do you love George Strong ? "

" Love ? " and she shook her head as though Malcolm were hopeless. " We leave love to the romantic poets and authors."

" But love should be the cement which builds up a home."

" As it does ours ? " she mocked. " You are vastly quaint, brother. The lady of your dreams has not yet arrived ? "

" She is difficult to find in this climbing, struggling world, Catherine, and now——" and he looked involuntarily towards his mutilated limb.

" I have sometimes thought that you might be having a *grande passion* for a certain beautiful young woman of the name of Kitty. A man has always the right——"

But Catherine stopped abruptly, scared at her brother's expression.

" I meant nothing ! " she said nervily. " But at least this person is leading the whole district to riot this very night."

" How do you know ? " he demanded. " Catherine, your tongue is your undoing—but as you have said so much—go on ! "

" Well," said Catherine, seeking to cover by a sensation her maladroit slip, " you remember that Mr. Coldstream who helped you home ? He has come down here on business from Whitehall. He has deluded the people into believing that there is to be a general rising on Midsummer Night. It seems that Miss Kitty Vipond has swallowed the whole story, and is the hot centre in Bracken Fell. Mr. Coldstream is in close touch with her, and the magistrates will now get the ringleaders of all this sedition. They will be caught red-handed to-night—the poor fools—and there will be peace at last."

" Peace ! " Malcolm's manner was intensely quiet.

" All is going vastly well, and Captain Dick—I beg his pardon—Major Rawby is in command of the yeomanry. Quite a sporting event."

" But Catherine, you mean that this Coldstream is a Government agent—a ——"

" Yes—a spy. One has to have spies, so long as this hideous sedition requires to be spied upon."

" And my father—knows ? "

" Of course ! " and she laughed. " And it is amusing enough to think that mamma's beacon to-night is to be the signal for Miss Vipond and her following. I understand she is to ride the ancient boundary—a second Lady of Bracken Fell ! Romantic enough for Mr. Scott."

" Catherine," burst out Malcolm, " our family sinned, when it robbed the people of the common."

" I oughtn't to have told you about Mr. Coldstream ! " and she pouted, alarmed at having agitated the patient, " and, Malcolm, one does not use the word ' sinned ' in these days. However—George will be getting ruffled if I do not appear. Mamma's affair will be a monstrous success—and you will be able to see the flames from the window."

She nodded and made her escape, and Malcolm was not sorry to see her go.

In a few moments he had written a note to Kitty, and sent for his page to deliver it.

" Dear Miss Vipond,—I have never yet thanked you for your great kindness to me, and one day I hope you will allow me to do so. But to-night it is I who wish to do you a service. In God's name don't do anything you have planned to do

to-night. You are being deceived and betrayed. I earnestly ask you to believe that I am writing very seriously. For the sake of those whose cause you would serve, beware of the trap that is being laid for you.

"Your sincere well-wisher,

"MALCOLM MASON."

Jim Richards was employed as Malcolm's page, and this afternoon, as he entered at his master's summons, his face was ashen, and he had difficulty in controlling himself.

"Why—Jim?" exclaimed Malcolm.

"How did you find out, sir?" he stammered.

"Find out what?" he asked gravely.

"My father is dying, sir—you'll know that—and they won't hang a man from his death-bed, sir?" he pleaded.

"Explain," said Malcolm.

"It was my mother who found them, and I know my father has been a bad 'un, but he is my father, sir. It would kill my mother, sir, for him to be hanged."

"I cannot help you, Jim, unless I understand."

"My mother thinks there'll be no luck for my father—where he is going, sir—unless I make a clean breast of it, sir. It was a boy—nearly hanged, sir. My father had a spite against him, and the mistress gave my father a lot of money to get him convicted. And here they are—just as my father picked them off the floor."

Malcolm took what the boy handed him. He turned the silver and diamond buckles over in his hand. His head was swimming, and Jim grew terrified at his silence.

"My father would like you to see him—but we've told him over and over that you can't, sir."

"No—I can't," said Malcolm. "Jim! Listen. You may rely on my keeping your father out of the hands of the law; but now, will you do something for me faithfully?"

"Yes sir, indeed, sir, anything, sir!" cried the boy, flushing hotly.

"I want you to put this letter into the hands of Miss Kitty Vipond. She is in danger. Find her and give it into her own hands. You understand?"

"Yes, sir," exclaimed the boy.

"Do not waste a moment, and say nothing to any one."

"Yes, sir."

But when the page was gone, Malcolm looked at the buckles once more. What did they mean? Why had his mother plotted with that old scoundrel Richards? Why had she so lowered herself? No—the world was not lovely. It was desperately cruel.

"Oh—my mother!" so the words broke from him.

X

KITTY GOES ON HER WAY

COLDSTREAM's seed had ripened well, and Kitty, flushed with pride and hope, regarded herself as a female Moses, about to lead the people out of the land of bondage into the Promised Land.

Coldstream had nourished her enthusiasm, and flattered her by his deference and his confidences concerning the marvellous revolution of which the affair in Bracken Fell was but the striking of the light. Half-intoxicated as she was by this "inside knowledge," Kitty's imagination added to what Coldstream told her, and she had no doubt but that all over the country, the people were rising to assert their power. Her task was to lead her beloved Bracken Fell to share in the harvest of triumph.

Her greatest difficulty had been to persuade the toilers to action, and it was sufficiently maddening to the girl to see how readily the down-trodden take the line of least resistance, so that they may win ease for an hour. Lady Mason was scoring heavily; for who could resist unlimited food, drink, sport and dance, even though it involved dancing to the lady's piping?

Kitty had just left the cottage where a few were holding a final conclave, and she was now on her way to make sure that her scouts were in their places to give the signal for the advance, when she noticed a young man rushing across a hayfield, leaping the cocks with such gay activity, that Kitty could not avoid watching him until he disappeared across a stretch of tumbled ground.

"You look as though you had lost your wits, lad!" So Jim heard a voice at his elbow, as he stood wondering in which direction he would find Miss Vipond.

Jim started. The speaker was Mr. Coldstream—well

known at the Manor House. Jim had waited upon him at the dinner table.

"Not my wits, sir," said Jim, off his guard in the presence of the Manor House guest; "but I have lost Miss Vipond," unconsciously his hand moved towards his breast pocket.

"I shall be with Miss Vipond in a few minutes," said Coldstream. "Shall I take the letter?"

Jim flushed and drew back his hand with a sudden caution.

"Letter?" As good luck would have it, he spied Miss Vipond in the distance, but as bad luck would have it, he felt a hand on his collar. He was flung to the ground, and Coldstream's hand was fumbling at his breast.

But Jim was powerful, and Coldstream had underrated the power of a boy's teeth. With a curse he let go, and held up a torn and bleeding hand.

Jim was up in an instant, dashing off in the direction in which he had seen Miss Vipond; he caught her up and delivered the letter.

"From Mr. Malcolm Mason, please, Miss Vipond."

"Ah!" she said coldly. She had wondered many times why she had never received the smallest acknowledgment from the Manor House of her attention to the heir.

"He wishes you to have it at once, miss. You are in danger."

"What do you mean?" This lad was son of the villain who had sent her Jack to Botany Bay.

"I have just bitten my teeth into a fellow who wanted to stop me giving it to you!" he said triumphantly.

Kitty read the letter through twice. The first time, she almost believed its face meaning. The second time, she decided that this was a bold attempt on the part of the young squire to stand by his father and ruin the people's cause. It was a sign that the great ones in the district were growing alarmed, and were seeking by this hole-and-corner method to allure her off the track.

Kitty smiled as she turned on Jim and crushed the letter in one strong palm.

"Any message, miss?" asked Jim.

"Inform your master that Kitty Vipond is not a fool, Jim Richards."

"But the danger!" urged the boy. "My master does not lie!"

"I was born to danger—tell your master," she said steadily.

Jim turned reluctantly away. He admired Miss Kitty Vipond, though from a very respectful distance. He knew, as did the rest, that she was holding herself for Jack Wolfson—if ever he returned. Kitty watched his hesitancy with triumph.

"If I were you, Jim Richards," she said, "I would refuse to be a tool of those who are crushing your class into the mire."

Jim looked at her wonderingly. Then he turned and darted away to give his master the report.

The vigorous onslaught of Jim's teeth had had the effect of unnerving Coldstream, for physical pain was something from which his cowardly nature shrank. But pain or no pain, he must discover what that note contained, for to fail now would damn his professional reputation irretrievably, not only in Bracken Fell, but in London.

He sank his burning hand into the beck, then wrapped it round with a silk handkerchief, just as he noticed that Miss Vipond was approaching.

"That young brute has injured you, Mr. Coldstream," she said indignantly.

"It is nothing!" and he bowed as though she were the finest lady in the land.

"You are sure?" then she drew out the crushed letter.

"The last effort of the enemy!" she said merrily. "But victory is within reach at last, and how we shall ever thank you——"

"I have been but a humble rushlight to flame your torch, Miss Vipond!" and again he bowed. He was bent on seeing the letter, but must wait his time.

"Mr. Malcolm Mason considers that I am in danger," she said, as she smoothed out the sheet; "but I have returned him a message that Kitty Vipond is no fool. Read it, if you care, sir."

He took the letter with well-feigned reluctance, yet his eyes shot eagerly from line to line. He handed it back and laughed out.

"Your horse is ready?" he asked.

"My horse is in the village—and so is my riding cloak," she said.

"Then let us return at once. It may be that Mr. Mason has got wind of what is about to occur, and if so, we had better carry out our design more quickly."

"How clever of you, Mr. Coldstream," she said, startled and admiring. "Perhaps we ought to go forth even before the beacon flares?"

"You and I think the same thoughts!" he said, flatteringly.

"It is wonderful to know that to-night—we shall be doing something which all the land is doing—in touch with the—the others!

'Midsummer Night is the People's Night,
Ere the red, red dawn appears!'"

"It is not the first time that a woman has been a maker of history," he said quietly.

XI

EARLY EVENING

Lady Mason was in high spirits. Her plans had matured well, and everything pointed to the success of her festival.

The nobility and gentry were giving their patronage, and it followed that all who wished to prove themselves to be in intimate touch with society, made a point of taking their share.

All the afternoon, Rawby Park, above which rose the famous beacon, had been thronged, and sports, dancing, and refreshments were enjoyed to the full. No such bonfire had ever been prepared on the beacon before, and old and young looked forward to enjoying the flare.

Major Rawby was also in high spirits, together with a batch of brother officers, for they were to lead out their merry men in support of the local constables, who, armed with magistrates' warrants, were to capture a good batch of Jacobins and other species of rebels, in the name of His Majesty and the Prince Regent. It was mightily necessary to prove to Parliament that sedition was of so rampant a nature that the stringent laws against which madmen were working, were vital to the safety of the realm.

Sir Peter's spirits were not good. They had failed him for some years. But at least he was thankful that his wife had a pastime to take her mind off her own nerves. As for the rest, he was fully prepared to support law and order, and to con-

vince the wage earners that they were fighting a mountain, when they tried to break down the unerring laws of political economy.

Wages must find their own level, and neither mill-owner nor mine-owner must dare to interfere with the universal law.

Jack Wolfson and Vipond soon discovered the great doings which were taking place in the park. A few questions had brought them ready answers, but they were not satisfied.

"I fancy that Master Dolling is still alive," suggested Jack.

"A good thought!" exclaimed Vipond. "I wonder if his cottage is still standing. Bracken Fell will have grown to a city, Jack, after thee and me return from our next sentences," and he laughed out.

Jack did not laugh.

"I would like to sit on the old stool, by Master Dolling's knee," he said, forgetting his six-foot height.

Mr. Dolling had long given up his shoemaking, but he managed to exercise oversight over his modest shop, from the armchair in the back parlour. But just now his soul was "exercised" with intense anxiety and with a terrible sense of disappointment. He had lost Kitty. Not, indeed, that she had ceased to visit him, and bring him dainties, but the fresh, keen confidence with which she had cheered him during his failing hours had withered. There was some barrier between them, against which he had not even the courage to expostulate.

When Jack knocked at the side door, which led directly to the parlour, Dolling gave an uninterested response, for he was, in the main, chair-fast, and was certainly not going to disturb himself to open the door.

Yet he stared keenly enough as a man stooped to enter, and then strode across the flagged floor, half tripped over the bright scrap rug, and drew up, tall and straight, with a wonderful smile on his rugged face.

Vipond stood behind, and it was he who spoke first.

"And has Master Dolling no greeting for an old blacksmith and his 'prentice?"

Dolling removed his reading glasses.

"It will never be Harry Vipond—landed back?" he exclaimed.

"Aye! To see how old England is wagging!"

Dolling thrust out his hand, ignoring the younger man.

"The Lord be praised! Bless the Lord, O my soul!" His voice quavered, and tears began to trickle down his cheeks.

Vipond laid a hand on his shoulder, but did not speak, out of sheer deference to the old man's mood.

"Oh Lord!" he pleaded, "forgive Thy servant's poor faithless heart! Thou hast not forgotten Thy wandering child, and hast sent Thy messenger to save her!"

"But save whom, Master Dolling?" asked Vipond.

"Who but Kitty?" he faltered, brushing away his tears.

Jack was about to spring forward, but Vipond motioned him back.

"You must tell us everything about Kitty!" said Vipond calmly, "but have you no word for Jack?"

Jack stepped aside so that light might shine on his face.

"Not John Wolfson's lad?" stammered Dolling.

"Aye, surely," said Jack, and pulling up the stool on which he used to sit as a boy, he straddled across it. "Why, Master Dolling, it is long weary years I have waited for the feel of this old stool, and the sight of yonder steel watch chain and——" he looked round and laid his hand on the old master's knee: "Don't you remember how you used to teach me the 'Our Father'?"

"Aye, aye, lad!" and Dolling laid a trembling hand on Jack's.

"And how often, if I had not seen your face, Master Dolling, carved into my memory, I should have done what many a man has done before."

"And what was that, Jack lad?" and he peered at him fearfully.

"Cursed God and died!" he said quietly. Then he sprang up. "But what do you mean about Kitty? What does my granny mean about Kitty? How can we save her? What is wrong?"

Dolling paused, finding it difficult to proceed.

"If I say what must be said, lad, thoo won't run off with the notion that the old man means to turn back on poor Kitty?"

"No, no!" answered Jack, but his heart sank, and glancing at Vipond he saw the burning anxiety reflecting his own.

"Kitty is as the very light of my eyes, and the finest and bravest woman in all Bracken Fell. There is nowt she wouldn't dare for the sake of the people, and against them that

crushes them down. But she is gey wilful—and I fear for her. Kitty thinks the old man is behind the times, and she gets grand news about the big doings in the wide world. She used to tell me all that was in her heart, but now—she says nothing. That is why I fear."

"But who brings her this news?" asked Jack.

"Mr. Coldstream. He stays at the 'Fur and Feathers.' He is collecting coins, so Kitty says, and he does a bit of painting, and Kitty believes all he says for gospel truth. He is a delegate from London."

"But a delegate for what?" asked Vipond.

"To lead the poor into a mischief!"

"You have seen him?" asked Jack.

"Nay. But Kitty told me, with all her fire blazing. When I stumbled at her news, and warned her—well—the old man disappointed her—and the wall has grown up between us—and it's like as though I was too old to have time for walls!" and again his lips quivered. "But Kitty is a grand lass, all the same," he added, as the two seemed unable to answer him, "and she brings me her paintings to see still."

"Paintings? Are all these done by Kitty?"

"Every one," said Dolling proudly. "Mr. Ross has been good to Kitty, and taught her a deal."

While Jack wandered round looking at the paintings, he was struggling against this blight of disappointment. His mental rehearsal of his home-coming had been so different. He had expected to find Kitty at his granny's, beautiful as he knew she was, and gentle and sparkling as she must be. Perhaps she would be laying the table, or sewing by the candle, or pulling out the soft flax. He had expected to startle the fire in her eyes, and to wring from her a cry of gladness.

As he folded her in his arms, he meant to remind her how they had plighted their troth, and how he had promised that she should grow her hair as long as she liked, wear silver buckles on her shoes, and have fresh roses every day.

But now——

But the long years of curbed, impotent passion came to his help. This was no hour for disappointment, but for action. What a fool he was to doubt. Kitty had always been hot-headed and rebellious, and his memory flashed him back to a child tied up in a cart, prepared to combat the whole parish and Adam Strong himself. She was being dragged into

danger. It was Grimstone who was at the bottom of it. He turned fiercely.

"Master Dolling, explain everything, so far as you can, so that we may save Kitty."

XII

MALCOLM PUTS ON HIS BOOT

MALCOLM, lying in a fever of anxiety at the Manor House, found a new mood beginning to dominate. He had been outside life long enough. He would throw off this intolerable invalidism, for it was intolerable to endure this cramping sick-room atmosphere.

"Malcolm!" exclaimed his father, as he looked in and saw his son sitting on a chair with his crutches beside him, drawing a heavy boot on his sound right foot.

"Why should I miss it all?" and he smiled.

"But—does your mother know—or the doctor?"

"Neither!" and he laughed. "I am a fully fledged rebel. This comfortable nest wearies me to distraction. Besides—tell me, sir, how much is true of what Catherine has just told me?"

"That she is engaged to the Hon. George Strong, only son of a peer of the realm?" mocked his father.

Malcolm shook his head. He and his father understood one another in certain directions.

"My mother and Catherine have given us so many frights! We ought to be thankful it is no worse than foolish George. But what is this about a plot, and the yeomanry in readiness——"

"Plot?" exclaimed his father testily.

"Well, if Catherine's tale is anywhere near the truth, it amounts to that. This Government spy business is making clamour in the House, and I hate that we should be mixed up in anything so unworthy of gentlemen. Assure me, sir, that Catherine is wrong?"

"You must realise, Malcolm," said his father, wincing, "that we are living in extraordinarily dangerous times, and, if civilisation is to progress, we must keep a firm hand on the lower orders, at any cost."

"At the cost of our own honour—at the cost of our very souls, sir?"

" Malcolm, I don't object to your being literary, poetical, or religious, so long as you don't interfere with practical affairs. A young man of your age——"

" My age, sir ? " Malcolm looked wondering towards his father. " At my age, sir—did you not dream dreams for yourself—for the world ? "

" Exactly ! " said his father quickly. " Dreams are dreams ; and to-day we face facts."

" At least, sir, I have faced an awkward fact. Miss Vipond saved my life, and now I find she is being led into trouble by a Government spy. I have sent her a warning message by Jim."

" You have ? " exclaimed his father.

But there was a knock at the door, and in answer to Malcolm's word, Jim entered. His flushed excitement died down at sight of the squire, but his master nodded reassuringly.

" Well, Jim, and the message ? "

" Miss Vipond won't believe the letter, sir. She said, sir, I was to tell you, sir, ' that she is no fool ! ' "

Sir Peter gave a nervous laugh, but Malcolm frowned.

" Mr. Coldstream tried to stop me giving her the letter, sir. He got me down, but I got my teeth into his hand—deep ! "

" You have done well," said his master, " and Jim—about that other matter—I am at liberty to tell Sir Peter and Lady Mason ? "

Scared and anxious, a great courage, nevertheless, swept over the young man.

" If it helps to put a wrong right, sir. You will know."

" Thank you, Jim ! " said his master cordially. " Keep at hand, I shall want you later."

" What was all that about ? " said Sir Peter drily. " The lad looked as though he had a murder on his conscience."

" He has been telling me a strange story, sir. Catherine's silver and diamond buckles have been found—a miscarriage of justice or worse."

In vain Malcolm hoped against hope that the expression on his father's face would not confirm grave doubts.

" What do you mean ? " Sir Peter stammered.

Malcolm reached for his crutches, and going across to a bureau, he pulled open a drawer.

" Poor Jack's story of having thrown them under the desk

in the gun room was true. Richards must have picked them up, and got the lad convicted on a lie."

Malcolm's tone had been hard, but as he showed the buckles on the palm of his hand, he relented at sight of his father's fierce agitation, as he gripped the end of the sofa for support.

"Father—I am sorry—you are ill?"

"Nonsense!" said Sir Peter sharply. He flung himself down in a chair and tried to show his perfect ease by pulling out his pipe and striking his flint.

It was impossible for Malcolm not to know that his parents had made a mess of their married life. Though maintaining the proprieties in public, the jarring unhappiness broke through only too often. When Jim made his wild confession, Malcolm understood in a flash much that had puzzled him. His mother must have had some distinct reason for wishing to get Jack out of the way. It was all very hideous.

But Sir Peter, though now outwardly controlled, was arguing passionately with himself. Should he unburden himself to his son, and break off the galling chain? For a few agitating moments he felt he must do so at all costs. Yet how could he deal the blow of disinheritance, just as his injured son was coming back into life. For the legality of his marriage with Madge had been known to him for years. In his honest moments he was bound to confess that it could never have been questioned. Yet still he reverted to those damning half-truths which from generation to generation make unhappiness in countless homes.

"I suppose," said Sir Peter roughly, "you may as well know that this Jack was a son of mine, by a waiting maid. Your mother was always suspicious, and I have always denied her charge. To deny was doubtless foolish, and if you will—immoral—but—human nature!" and he puffed his pipe alight.

"Your mother never believed me. I have always known that," he continued bitterly, as his son found himself unable to utter a word. "She is a woman of persistence—I presume she abetted Richards in his plan to——"

"But—a hanging charge—false—it was murder!" interrupted Malcolm breathlessly.

"No—no!" said his father sharply. "Your mother—I—have always believed the boy was guilty. The evidence was clear enough for both judge and jury—If Richards lied——"

But Sir Peter was miscalculating his strength. He buried his face in his hands, if so be he might blot out the look of the twelve-year-old boy, pleading his innocence in the hateful dock.

"Oh sir!" It was all Malcolm could say. How could he accuse his own father of cowardice? Yet on the face of it, it looked as though his father had allowed a boy to be transported, in order to quell the nagging insinuations of his wife. He shrank to silence, and his mood cut his father more acutely than any torrent of reproach.

"Miss Vipond still gets a letter now and again from Jack. He is not dead. He is not, I hope, ruined—what shall we do?"

"Do? Malcolm, remember there is no use whatever in raising any fuss with your mother. Sleeping dogs had better lie on," said Sir Peter rising.

"And yet, father——"

But his call was disregarded. His father had gone, and Malcolm sank back, his thoughts flooding.

Jack, that odd, whimsical playmate of his—spirited off to the hell of Botany Bay, was his own half-brother—and his father had known it. Did his Aunt Mary know also? Had all his family conspired in this devil's plot?

He struggled on with his dressing. If even a modicum of what Catherine had told him were true, they were about to commit a further wrong. It was monstrous to involve Jack's future wife in a mad act which might bring her and many others under arrest and the devil knew what. There was not a moment to lose, and he tinkled the bell at his side to summon Jim.

XIII

THE LADY OF BRACKEN FELL

"Midsummer Night is the People's Night,
Ere the red, red dawn appears."

"FOR the last time I say it, Miss Vipond!" said Coldstream deferentially, as he handed Kitty to her white horse.

"And one day, how the people will thank you!" she said fervently, as she put out her hand.

"'Tis the Lady of Bracken Fell who will gain the people's

thanks and the people's prayers," he said softly, and then kissed her hand as though she had been a queen.

Then Kitty sat up straight and radiant. The great action had begun, and a cheer rose from the group of stalwarts already assembled. Kitty smiled, and lifted her riding whip in response; and her beauty quelled their last doubt. They would follow their leader, if it must be, to hell's mouth.

"For your own land, for your fathers' land!" she cried. "If the tyrants bar my way, smash down their barriers and clear the way of the people!"

"Aye, aye!" came from loyal lips. The Lady of Bracken Fell had started. So the cry passed from mouth to mouth. The white horse, and Kitty in her white hood and riding cloak, led the way. Who dared to stay behind?

Coldstream, mounted on a brown mare, followed the people, and smiled grimly, as, taking up the cry, they rushed along by the side of their leader as she made for the first fence which enclosed a portion of the old common. The land was now in the possession of a large farmer, well-known for the pittances he was offering his labourers. Kitty stopped, and at her signal, men, armed with axes, crashed down the fences, that the crowd might pour through.

"No injury to aught save the fences," cried Kitty, a trifle alarmed at the excitement the first blow was creating. The crowd, indeed, took no heed of her, as with wild clamour they swarmed across the field.

And high up on a post of observation close to the beacon, Major Rawby, telescope in hand, gave a shout of satisfaction to his brother officers.

"They have started, the rabble! See!"

"Give them rope—don't let us move too soon, sir!" suggested the constable.

"No!" muttered Rawby. Then he laughed out. "You know the ringleaders, constable, and as for the fair lady—she rides well, and under yonder white cloak, she has, doubtless, a soft neck, which it would be shame to scar with a rough hempen necklace!"

The constable laughed out heartily at the joke, and, meanwhile, the success of the Lady of Bracken Fell was undoubted. Women, joining the men, outdid them in the violence of their passion. A couple of hundred colliers from Bishop's End had crossed the country and were welcomed by excited cheers.

Kitty breathed more freely. The months of endeavour were bearing fruit, and it was evident that there was to be no hanging back, for the crowds of merry-makers at the park, catching wind of the earlier start, were now pouring down to join the fence-breakers. And the whole of England was doing this same thing at this precise moment, so Coldstream had said. There was the intoxicating thought.

Having broken through a dozen fences the white horse stopped at the entrance to an enclosed wood, where past generations had gathered their faggots, their nuts, their blackberries.

"Wood! Wood! We will have wood for our fires!" shrieked the people.

"Your merry men serve you well, my lady!" said Coldstream, reining up.

"It is glorious!" cried Kitty, wholly intoxicated.

But from the beacon height, Rawby uttered a sharp exclamation.

"Jove! They are in our wood—the young pheasants—We must get at them now!"

Even as he spoke, some one threw a prematurely lighted torch on the bonfire. In a moment it was roaring and crackling towards the sky.

"The beacon! See—the beacon!" shouted the people.

"The red dawn is on the way!" called Coldstream with a triumphant shout.

But Vipond and Jack had seen the flare of the beacon, and had heard the shouting of the distant crowd, and Jack, outstripping the older man, made a cross-country rush towards the fence-breakers.

Gaining the outskirts of the excited crowd, he paused, unknown amongst these friends and playmates of his boyhood. What chance would he have to bring them out of danger?

Ah—there was Kitty.

He noticed in the gloom her white cloak and hood, her hair escaping about her face, her imperious gestures. Yes—there was Kitty, who had fought mill-owner and workhouse official, beaten, yet still rebellious, still proud, still obstinate. He had rescued her then. Could he rescue her now? Would Kitty, indeed, allow him to rescue her, or would she for ever scorn him for the attempt?

And then he saw a man on a brown mare talking familiarly to Kitty. Gentleman Grimstone—who had lured his brother convicts to riot, and had then wormed himself into the good graces of authority by giving them away, was there—before his eyes—hounding on Kitty and the others to calamity. Grimstone would doubtless secure a fat bag of gold from the Government, while for Kitty and her fellows there would be the horror of court and chains, lashings, filth—the whole nightmare rose to Jack's vision.

"Hold!" he shouted, rushing forward. "Hold, in God's name! You are betrayed!"

Kitty threw up her head, and turning, she dragged at her rein till the white horse reared.

"Quick! Stop him! Don't let him go!" shouted Jack, pointing towards Coldstream, who, for the instant, was too amazed to move.

"How dare you?" shouted Kitty, raising her whip as Jack made for Coldstream.

"I dare, Kitty!" and he laughed into her face, "for the sake of you and the people! Lads!" and he turned, "in God's name help me to hold a scoundrel who is plotting your ruin—an accursed Government spy!" He had Coldstream by the two wrists, and was dragging him off his horse, when the blacksmith came shouldering through the crowd to his help.

But the people, who had met with but feeble opposition from the alarmed farmers, could not easily brook interference in this hour of triumph, and there were ugly sounds, as it became plain that their lady was furiously angry.

"Men of Bracken Fell and Bishop's End, to the rescue!" she called passionately, as she set her horse towards the captured man.

"Fools! Don't you know Harry Vipond? Transported for rioting many a year ago!"

Kitty reined back her horse.

"Vipond! Vipond?" went from lip to lip. "Why—it is Kitty's father come home!"

"Don't you fret, my man!" said Vipond to his prisoner. "I've got you tight enough!" and he buckled his own belt about the man adroitly. "Mr. Grimstone, Convict No. 999!"

Kitty tightened her lips and clenched her hands. She was

wrestling with her pride. Her father come home—to turn against the people—and that other man—could he be Jack ? "

But Jack, bent on saving the situation, ignored her, and climbing up the trunk of a tree, he shouted to make himself heard to the outskirts of the crowd.

" Who remembers John Wolfson's son ? " He got their attention, and his handsome face and merry smile did more than his words to give the roughest of them pause.

" Listen to Jack ! Nancy's Jack ! " he cried, and his glorious voice rang out :

> " For a' that and a' that,
> It's coming yet for a' that !
> When man to man, the warld o'er
> Shall brithers be, for a' that ! "

" Jack ! Jack Wolfson come home ! " shouted one and another, and Kitty was forced to sit there, a deposed queen, watching her following deserting her.

This was Jack's home-coming, of which she had so long dreamed. It was for this she had wasted her girlhood. Angry tears started to her eyes.

" On ! On with you ! " she cried. " Will you be turned back to your own ruin by a song ? "

" But 'tis John Wolfson's son ! " came the answer.

" John Wolfson's son shall not stop me from riding the boundary to-night ! " she cried furiously.

But the attention of the crowd was again turned aside, both from their beautiful leader and the man who had ceased to struggle under the capturing hand of Vipond and his assistants, for a rider came into sight, with a young man at his bridle.

" The young squire ! " said some one fearfully.

" Get to your homes ! " so his voice rang out. " The yeomanry are riding down upon you from the beacon ! It is a plot—a vile plot my friends—Go—every one of you—while there is time."

Pale, shattered, with his maimed leg hanging helpless above the stirrup, his thin nervous voice had more effect even than Jack's, and Kitty realised that her last hold on her empire had broken like a thread in a candle. For every one knew the young squire. Every one knew he had been maimed in a man-

trap, and there was many a tale going, concerning well-timed help he had given to unfortunate victims of the law.

"Miss Vipond," he pleaded, raising his hat. "Save these people!"

"So I would," she said bitterly, "but they refuse to be saved."

"But yonder man——" and he pointed to Coldstream, "is—oh, you must believe me, Miss Vipond—he is in the pay of the Government to betray you!"

But Kitty, in her rage, scarcely took in his words.

"Do you follow the young squire or the Lady of Bracken Fell?" she cried.

"Begone—every man and woman of you!" shouted Jack dictatorially.

Jack's alarm took its effect. Kitty saw plainly enough that all was over.

"Take your will!" she cried proudly and vaguely, and slashing her horse, she galloped off, never drawing rein until she reached home.

She slipped from her horse, tethered him, and entered. Her face was ashen; she was trembling in every limb.

"My lass! My bonny lass!" cried Nancy solicitously.

But Kitty made no answer. She stood gazing round her unseeingly.

"John Wolfson's son has come home!" said Nancy nervously.

"I know! I know! Oh, granny! The people!" and, flinging herself down, she buried her face in Nancy's lap and broke into a wild paroxysm of weeping.

"When Jack comes home——" began Nancy.

"Damn Jack!" groaned Kitty, and poor horrified Nancy fled to hide herself in her own back room.

XIV

BROTHERS

At the wood the warning had done its work, and already the more timid had hurried away.

"Look!" cried Jack, pointing to the beacon, which now flamed against the evening sky. "It is true what yonder scoundrel has told you! The red dawn will break, as the chains

of the people will break. But shattered fences will not serve. We must be out for bigger deeds ! I, John Wolfson's son will lead you six weeks hence to Manchester. There in our thousands we will demand our votes, with one voice that shall ring through England. But to-night get you gone—every man and woman of you—that we may live to struggle again."

He ceased. There was a smothered cheer, then what remained of the crowd drifted away, as though by magic. Vipond and Jack, the prisoner, Malcolm and Jim alone remained.

Coldstream was profoundly relieved. At least he was not to be torn to pieces by an enraged mob. But as a Government spy he was ruined, for a spy discovered could never again be used. He would now be thrown mercilessly on the scrap heap.

But Malcolm had listened to the impassioned appeal to the rioters with amazed eagerness. With his mind full of his father's story, it seemed as though Jack had dropped from the sky as by some provident miracle. And, moreover, it was impossible not to recognise the very features and build of his father in this bold young stranger. He and Jack were brothers. Malcolm held out his hand.

" Good evening, sir ! " said Jack, lifting his hat, and looking at the pale rider with a pity impossible to disguise.

" Jack—welcome to Bracken Fell ! " said Malcolm frankly. " Once I saved you from a flogging, and once you saved me from a colliers' mob, and now—together—we must save these poor folk from something worse than either ! "

" But, sir—your foot ? " said Jack.

" You miss it ? " he asked whimsically. " If man-traps lie in the woods, a wood lover like myself risks his limbs ! "

But galloping horses were coming nearer, and a smile crossed Malcolm's face at the thought of the major's disappointment.

But Jack's hot blood burned hotter, and he stood his ground to watch the gallant officer gallantly leading his men to an empty battlefield.

" But where are they ? " he blustered, as he reined up and called a halt.

" Whom do you seek, Rawby ? " asked Malcolm. " Is this some part of my mother's masquerade ? "

"Confound you, Mason! I thought you were in bed. But—the damned rioters—which way——"

"It is quiet enough here!" said Malcolm, "save for this unfortunate gentleman, whom we discovered urging a few poor fools to mischief. We have sent the fools home, but this gentleman remains. Perhaps your will is to horsewhip him out of the district?"

Coldstream received a glance and a sneer. A fallen tool is but worth a sneer, and the man cringed in his bonds.

"You have failed—monstrously!" blustered Rawby, and he turned wrathfully away.

"Then arrest me!" cried Coldstream, as he caught sight of the constable. "I am from Whitehall—I claim the safety of arrest—I dare not be about in this neighbourhood—now."

"We don't arrest Government officials, or we get into trouble," said the constable looking down on the man as he writhed under Vipond's belt. "Cut him loose—whoever you are—and let him go."

"Shall I, Jack?" asked Vipond. "'Tis more than Number 999 would have done for you over yonder!"

"'Tis time we forgot hell!" muttered Jack, disgustedly.

Vipond unbuckled the belt, lifted his foot to give a parting kick, then drew it back and laughed.

"Ill work, wasting good kicks!" he said drily. Coldstream struggled to his feet and made a dash through the gathering gloom.

Vipond looked meaningly at Jack, and they watched as the major, after hot consultation, ordered off his men and galloped away.

"It is Kitty we must seek," he said under his breath. "I doubt not but the lass is breaking her heart for this work of ours!"

"Aye," agreed Jack, and he turned towards Malcolm.

"Good-night, sir."

"Look here, Wolfson," said Malcolm hurriedly, "You can see what a broken-down lot I am; but will you come up to the Manor House—no—perhaps that would hardly do—but—how can we meet?"

Jack saw at once that the Manor House was to be closed to him—the ex-convict—but no ill-will crossed his mind against the friend of his boyhood.

"Harry Vipond and I are lodging with Mr. Dolling, sir,"

hinted Jack; "but, indeed, our hearts dwell in Mistress Fodderty's cottage!"

"Kitty is my daughter, sir," said Vipond proudly.

"Miss Vipond is a brave woman," said Malcolm, "but she has been basely deceived. I wrote to warn her, but—I cannot be surprised that she did not trust me. Come, Jim, lead me home."

"Yes, sir!" said the young man.

But a swift thought made Malcolm pause. Intense curiosity seized him as to how this new brother of his might act towards a man who had once done him a hideous wrong.

"Richards, our keeper, is lying at death's door to-night. This is his son, Jim."

"Richards—dying?" Jack stood very upright, and his cheeks burned. Jim, in a fever of agitation, took a step forward. Then cringed backwards.

"You—are his son?" said Jack.

"He is my father—and the doctor has doomed him, sir!"

"A boy of twelve was once doomed to the long journey your father is to take—but not by a doctor."

But Jim laid a hand on Jack's arm, as he was turning fiercely away.

"But sir," he said brokenly, "you are here—strong, young, splendid, and my father—— Oh sir, if you would but see my father to-night!"

"To-night—see your father? That is swift work."

"There comes not always a morning to a dying man!" said Jim with an unexpected illumination.

Jack's power lay in a certain generosity of temperament, which aided him to thrust aside the past and refuse to himself the luxury of a morbid self-pity. Life must, after all, go on. Hot work remained—the day's joy, the day's pain, some hidden agony in front—who knew? If his old enemy's son wished him to visit his father, he would not be churlish. There was no time in the world for churlishness.

"See here, Vipond," he said. "Hurry away to Kitty, for at least she belongs to you, and whether she will ever belong to Jack Wolfson, depends on—Jack Wolfson!" and he paused. "I will find my way to granny's cottage when I have done—what I must do."

"You will really come, sir?" cried Jim feverishly.

"We can go together," said Malcolm, "so far as our way may lie."

As, a little later, Jack walked slowly up a narrow lane to the keeper's house, guided by his past memory, many thoughts strove within him.

He had sworn that he would forget Botany Bay and its cursed nightmares, and yet, how can a man forget? In fact, was it even right to seek to forget this tremendous discipline which had enveloped him, body, soul and spirit? In his anguish he had learnt life as he could never have learnt it, had he lived on as a wilful, conceited idol of a village. He had, at least, gained the treasure of some comprehension of that strange spiritual force which some call God.

And yet he could not admit with a smug ease that all had been for the best. Was it even honest to accept in any sense the dastardly action of Richards as part of God's will for him? What he had suffered could not be God's will. Then whose will was it? What was this in the world which was so continuously fighting against the declared will of God?

"How often shall thy brother trespass against thee?" throbbed the century-old question. "Not seven times, but till seventy-times seven!"

Jack, in fairness to himself, admitted that he had tried to forget, but was God demanding that he must also forgive? And what, indeed, was forgiveness?"

"As far as the east is from the west so far have I removed thy transgressions from thee!" He had learnt that on his little stool by Master Dolling's knee.

Jack gazed skywards.

"As far as the east is from the west!" The whole universe between himself and the keeper's wrong. How could he gather his revenge to him again? The thought was infinite. He stood still, wrestling with himself. Why had this task blocked his way? Was he to undergo a spiritual baptism, which was to prepare him for his work for the people?

Did the road to conquest lie through the purging of his own heart from the ice and the bitterness and the boiling heat of revenge? Was he first compelled to forgive the world, before he could be used as an instrument to save it?

He left the point unsettled, for the door of the house opened, and a stream of light broke across the path. A

woman stood outlined, and Jack saw that she lifted her hands towards the stars.

"My God! Send him not to his death—a lost soul—a lost soul——"

Afraid to prove himself an eavesdropper, Jack came forward, and the woman gazed towards him terrified.

"Who are you?" she asked fearfully.

"Do not be afraid of me, Mrs. Richards. I wish no ill to your husband."

"But—why should you wish him ill?"

"He might think I did. I am John Wolfson's son."

She clutched his arm, and would have fallen except for his strong support.

"Your lad, Jim, asked me to come, so I have come," said Jack simply.

It has been found that an evil man may do many a deed of horror during his life, yet at the end something stands out, overshadowing all else. In King John's dying moments, it was the murder of Prince Arthur and the starving to death of the Lady of Braose which racked the king to torment. So on this Midsummer Night, as the old keeper lay in the agony of an internal disease, it was the vision of a boy awaiting a false verdict with proud defiant eyes which burned in upon him, and made him cry out in his semi-delirium.

When Jack entered, the dying man was lying back exhausted, and Mrs. Richards drew him into the shadow. But the patient had heard, and he flung himself to a half-sitting posture.

"Betty! Betty! 'Tis John Wolfson's son! Hear his singing. Whisht!" A death-like pause followed. "The people—clapping Nancy's Jack! He shouts with laughter—Damn him!"

Jack would not have known his enemy as he lay on that four-post bed, old, emaciated, his eyes staring from their deep sockets, his hands twitching at the patchwork quilt, his whole frame writhing under the bedclothes.

Jack sat down where the candle light might illuminate his face, and waited.

"The squire!" Richards muttered, and his mouth fell open. "Sir—sir! Get John Wolfson's son home!"

Jack saw his opportunity, and leaned forward.

"I am not the squire, Richards! I am Nancy's Jack—come home."

The slow, confident and somewhat dominating voice had its effect. The man's restlessness was quelled. Yet he shook his head and stared towards the speaker.

"You lie, sir. You are the squire. Beg pardon, sir, but how came you to leave them buckles in the gun room? Why did you—why did you, sir?" It seemed that he might go on muttering endlessly, and Jack pondered how he might break the strange delusion.

"Nancy's Jack was ever a good singer, Richards. Listen while he sings," and Jack's rich voice, modulated to the solemnity of this room of death, sang a few lines of one of Wesley's hymns, learnt, as he had learnt his psalm, in Master Dolling's back room.

"Other refuge have I none,
Hangs my helpless soul on Thee,
Leave, ah! leave me not alone,
Still support and comfort me.
Plenteous grace with Thee is found,
Grace to cover all my sin——"

Jack stopped, for he noticed that the man had closed his eyes, and his lips were moving silently.

"It was for money—for gold—accursed gold I did it! For thirty pieces of silver Judas damned his soul—It took fifty gold pieces to damn mine!"

"Who gave you this gold to send Jack out of the country?" asked Jack very steadily.

For a moment the man hesitated, then his voice sank to a whisper of terror.

"Her ladyship—she said—'Here is gold, Richards—don't trouble Sir Peter'—Guineas in a bag. I counted them—one, two, three, four——" his voice trailed into silence.

For a moment Jack, altogether amazed, wished that he might shake the dying man to get the truth from him. But his generous instinct leashed him. How could he persecute in so dreadful an hour?

"Sir——" and he saw that Mrs. Richards had flung herself at his knee. "Let not his crime go down to the grave with him!"

Jack raised her, and as he did so, he noticed the glazing eye of the dying man and the spasmodic surging of his tortured frame.

"Richards," he said clearly, as he bent over him. "John Wolfson's son forgives, as far as the east is from the west."

The man put out his hand. Jack gripped it between his own, and the hand tightened and tightened, until presently Jack loosened the fingers of the dead, and laid the hand back on the coverlet.

"For ever—I thank you, sir," whispered the woman. Then, turning, she noticed that her son had come in, and she clutched his hand.

The young man gazed speechlessly at his dead father, then he looked towards Jack. But Jack had turned away, and was leaning up against a chest of drawers with his forehead pressed into his hands.

"He forgave him—as far as the east is from the west," sobbed the woman.

Jim put an arm about her and kissed her. Mrs. Richards was one of those wonder-women who remain faithful to a bad man right to the end, and Jim, her youngest, understood, and leaving her, he crossed the room.

"Sir—you have done a great deed this night."

"Great!" Jack turned burning eyes upon him. "It is not for us, forgiven seventy-time-seven ourselves, to rob one another of the forgiving word."

XV

VIPOND TAKES A HAND

Kitty was very miserable, and poor distracted Nancy could think of no means of comforting her, for Kitty believed utterly, that the ruined ride was the ruin of all hope.

At last she went restlessly out into the night. Yet what joy could this night have for her?

Midsummer night was neither the people's night, nor the night of her dreams. She was no longer some one in touch with the great advance movement of the world, a maker of history, but just Kitty Vipond, a woman who had been fooled, as so many women have been fooled.

It was the white horse, waiting so patiently under the tree, that brought about her first sense of compunction.

"Poor Snowflake!" she muttered. She patted his neck, and leaned her cheek against him. Then she took off the

saddle and bridle and let him roam free in the paddock while she seated herself under a wild cherry tree, at a spot from which she had often looked with such pulsing agitation and anticipation at the distant summit of the beacon.

A deep bluish-purple answered her gaze. If there had been any red glow it had faded. Everything was as it had been. The poor were still oppressed, the land still remained to the robbers, tyranny was triumphant, and Jack—well—he had come home, but only as prime destroyer of the people's cause.

" Oh—how dare he ! How dare he do it ? " she murmured, as she gripped her hands.

The tempest of her soul was still at its height when a heavy footfall attracted her attention. She saw her father enter the cottage, and it would surely have been the natural thing for Kitty to rush to his side and fling her arms about him.

But Kitty made no motion. Across the blindless window, she watched her father pass, and she could imagine him seated in the Windsor chair, asking for his daughter. Yet hard and unyielding, Kitty drew her white riding cloak about her and refused her heart's call.

She could not go in. Yet with an utter inconsistency, she was feeling herself insulted because Jack had not also come.

But Vipond had not left his farm and his business across the sea, in order to spend the end of this great evening in Nancy's kitchen, while his daughter spent it sitting in the sulks under a tree ; and presently, having gleaned a good deal of valuable information from Nancy's disjointed speech, he rose, deciding that the time had come to put an end to so uncomfortable a position.

Kitty's tempers rose more quickly than they subsided, and as she saw the light stream across a rose bush, she guessed that an attack was to be made upon her.

Vipond did not come forward at once, even though he could distinguish the white cloak, and knew that the girl must have seen him come from the cottage.

A tender smile crossed his face. Kitty was proving herself to be her mother's daughter, and he recalled more than one courting trouble.

But Vipond had reached middle life, and counted himself as something of a diplomatist. Therefore, he strode forward as though it were the most natural thing in the world for Kitty to be sitting out alone enjoying the soft air, and watching the

advent of the adventurous stars, which peeped out somewhat perplexedly into this night which was never to be really dark.

"'Tis a wonderful Midsummer Night, Kitty!" he said quietly. Kitty rose, and pointed towards the east.

"There is no glow—there is nothing! Nothing! Oh father, how could you do it?"

Vipond took his daughter's hand, kissed her, and then gently forced her back to the bench and seated himself beside her.

"Thou art a woman grown, Kitty, lass!" he said.

"It appears that I am nothing but a child!" she said stiffly.

"And older than thy poor mother when she bore thee!" he continued, ignoring her tone. "Thy mother was a beautiful woman, but not so beautiful as thee!"

Kitty gave an impatient movement.

"Jack and I have returned home with a great purpose, and it is good to know, lass, that thy heart is burning and ready to——"

"Oh father—stop—do!" cried the girl as though from a bed of torture. "Can't we be honest with one another? In this hour, when the people rise through all England, Bracken Fell alone is to choke in the slough—and in every home the folk are muttering that Kitty Vipond—I—this woman who sits here—is the betrayer! Can't you understand——" she continued, as her father did not answer her, "that I would have died for them?"

"It is a great thing to die, lass, but sometimes it is a bigger thing and a harder thing to live! But——" and his tone was obstinately triumphant, "the biggest joy I have to-day is to know that my own lass is in the struggle!"

"The struggle? It is over—we are undone!"

"Till the will of God is done on earth as it is done in heaven, the struggle cannot be over."

"In heaven! What is God doing in heaven? Tell me that!" she scoffed.

"His will—and what that is—we poor folk——"

"I reckon nothing of dreams!" she interrupted, "What good are dreams, when the people slink along to the parish overseers, to beg for the very pay which the big folk have stolen out of their homes?"

"Does ta think, lass," said her father steadily, "that Kitty Vipond alone in all the world is to win through without some

stiff training? Is Kitty never to make a mistake? Folk who never make a mistake, make nowt!"

But Vipond stopped at sight of a man creeping along the hedge side towards the cottage door. Kitty saw also, and sat speechless.

The man looked in at the window, and laid his hand on the latch.

"Yonder is Mr. Coldstream," she said, rising.

"His real name is Grimstone. Jack and I met him out in Botany Bay. He is a Government spy."

"Oh father—why must you still plot against the people?" She darted away towards the cottage, and Vipond, rising, followed her. At least he would keep guard, even though Kitty must buy her own experience. He prayed that she might not buy it too dearly.

But even as Kitty crossed the paddock a great doubt was fermenting in a most unwilling mind.

For weeks she had been gently mocking her granny for her delusion concerning Mr. Coldstream, yet now—her own father had called him Grimstone. It was terrible to her proud nature to have to admit that, possibly, it was she who had been the fool. Yet when not maddened against all thought, the eager-hearted woman was anxiously honest. But a month's delirious excitement, which was to have found its consummation on that Midsummer Night, could not subside without a tempestuous contest.

The man had entered the cottage, and through the window Kitty saw that her granny was engaged in her favourite pastime. From behind a wainscot panel, she had taken out three leather bags of gold and was soothing herself by counting the pieces.

Then her granny looked up—in an instant she was leaping upon Grimstone, and as swiftly the man flung her aside, and grabbed at the gold.

"Father! Father!" cried the girl. The national leader for progress and liberty was robbing an old woman before her eyes.

"Oh granny!" she exclaimed, stooping over her.

But Grimstone's violence seemed to have set free Nancy's powers, and she struggled against Kitty to fly at the intruder.

"So!" cried Kitty. "Now I understand!"

"Gold! For God's sake, Miss Vipond, let me have a little gold!" he cried with an abject and despicable terror.

"No!" thundered Vipond, as he filled up the doorway.

The wretched man saw himself trapped. His last hope had been to prevail upon Miss Vipond to save him, yet even this desperate hour had not taught him that his one chance must lie in an open confession.

"Tell me! Are you a Government spy?" she demanded.

"No!" he protested. "It is a confounded plot. The people are betrayed, you are betrayed, and now—when the people would rend me to pieces—Miss Vipond—you cannot forsake me?" He was putting out a hand to touch her when he started wildly, as loud shouts could be heard.

Kitty gazed at her father for direction, and Grimstone, seeing a narrow doorway, made a dash up the stairs, even as Vipond was pushed aside by a dozen men who rushed the entrance, the forerunners of a frantic crowd outside.

But Nancy, having swept the gold into her lap, sat back in the shadow, clutching it to her, and eyeing the intruders with a perplexed curiosity.

"How now?" demanded Vipond. "Why enter an old woman's cottage so rudely, lads?"

They stood back, but only for an instant.

"We want yonder spy, Miss Kitty!" said the leader. "He is somewhere round here. Back and forwards to the gentry—got the yeomanry on our track——"

"We know all that," interrupted Vipond good-humouredly, "but you could not expect Mistress Fodderty here to house a rascal like Grimstone?"

Nancy spoke from the shadow.

"Grimstone—a devil—a devil—he murdered my lover—down by the quarry. Ha! ha! ha! Catch him. Blind him. Crush him to powder!"

"Friends," said Kitty, "why waste time on a devil? Come—they shout too noisily outside. Let me speak to you all!" and pushing through them, she passed like some shaft of light to the doorway.

"'Tis Mistress Kitty!" rose the shout.

Kitty flung back her cloak, and one white arm was stretched out towards them, while the other gripped her bosom. Yet when she spoke her voice sounded strange to them.

"My friends—my friends—don't shout for Kitty.

Trample on her—tear her limb from limb—Who is it but Kitty who has deceived you and betrayed you, and led you along a blind road ? "

" Nay, nay ! " shouted several, and Jack, standing unseen, listened.

It is a solemn thing to see a good man die, but to see a bad man die is tragedy. And yet it had not really torn Jack's soul to forgive Richards. It was lucky that Grimstone had sneaked off—never to be seen again. Jack had come to this comfortable conclusion when he realised that the night was not yet over, and as he hurried to understand the reason of these strange sounds, he came upon the eager crowd, which Kitty was compelling to attention. At least he had as much right to listen as the humblest dweller in Bracken Fell.

" What use, friends," she cried " to shout ' Nay ' to Kitty. She knows what she does know. It is Kitty who told you she knew the way out. She knows no way out. There is no way out. The devil rules, and against such a ruler there is no hope. So get home, every one of you ! Men—women—children. Slave ! Starve ! Sink down into the mire. Eat your mud, wear your rags, stare at your own horror, for I, Kitty, tell you there is no God. There is no hope ! There is nothing ! Nothing but the night ! " and both her white arms were flung out towards the stars.

" Then give us a hold o' this spy fellow ! " shouted a woman. " Let us tie hand and foot, and throw him into the river."

" Aye—let him choke and choke down to hell ! " shouted another.

" But—Mistress Kitty——" called another. " You mean to say there is no rising in all the land from Scotland to London ? "

" I tell you there is nothing ! Nothing ! "

" And no ' red dawn ' ? " shrieked a woman.

" Nothing but ruin—and pain—and so—the devil help us ! " retorted the girl.

" Three cheers for Mistress Kitty ! " yelled an enthusiast.

" Oh don't ! My heart is broken ! " came their answer.

Jack made a movement forward, then he shrank back. He felt himself to be a dealer of death wounds. Was it not he who had given the blow and dashed the fair hopes of this glorious woman ? He could only see her outline, in misty

whiteness, and her pleading white arms. It hurts even to take a dangerous plaything from the eager clutch of some beautiful child.

"Get home, men and women!" she urged once more. "The fellow you would fling into a river bed is never worth your claws. It is midnight, and Mistress Fodderty ought to rest."

But Kitty had not noticed that Nancy was now standing beside her.

"Three cheers for Mistress Fodderty!" cried an old man.

Kitty turned with immediate anxiety, and laid an arm about the trembling old woman.

"'Tis never the dawn till the morning!" cried Nancy. "See you, the devil flies—flies. Who will follow and chase him out of the world?" It was as though she herself would have started on the devil's chase had not Kitty held her back.

"Where is the devil?" she demanded in a quavering voice. "He is here!" and she clutched at her own breast. "He is there!" and she pointed to Kitty. "He is there, and there!" and she pointed at one and another of the startled crowd. "Catch the devil—chase him out of the world—and then—then——"

"And what then, Mistress Fodderty?" cried some one.

"Then the dawn will come!"

"The red, red dawn, Mistress?"

"'Tis no red dawn when the devil is dead! The dawn is golden and the children have wings, and then—see—see—they bathe themselves in the morning! Ha! ha! ha!"

Nancy's wild imagination turned the crowd from their first purpose, and convinced them that no spy was likely to be found on her premises; but now the old woman unconsciously raised another barrier between them and the man shrinking in terror upstairs.

"See!" she cried, holding out a bag of gold, "For every one a piece of the golden sky!" and she began to fumble.

Vipond came forward, anxious that she should not, in her irresponsibility, impoverish herself. But Kitty motioned him back.

"Aye, granny, give it to them," she said, with her old joyousness.

So the gold was scattered, and the pathetic thanks poured out, and at last the people allowed themselves to be dismissed.

"He must be in my room," said Kitty, in a low tone to her father.

"Aye!" he nodded. But Kitty was looking at a man emerging from the darkness.

"Take granny indoors," she said rapidly, and as Vipond persuaded Nancy into the cottage, Jack came quietly forward and raised his hat.

"Miss Vipond," he began deferentially, "it is right that you should not forgive, until you understand all."

"You heard what I said?" she demanded.

"That your heart was broken—for the people!"

"Oh—Jack—Wolfson!" she moaned.

"Why not just 'Jack,' Nancy's Jack, Miss Vipond?" he asked, seeking for her hand.

"Because—why not Nancy's Kitty?"

"Come indoors," he said eagerly, putting an arm about her. "Kitty—Kitty—come somewhere into the light, so that I may look into your eyes and see whether this is true!"

XVI

IS IT TRUE?

THAT Kitty should have allowed herself to be led into the light by this Jack whom she had just repudiated with scorn, proves the glorious and perplexing inconsistency of the human heart.

But Jack had scarcely taken one glance, ere he was claimed by Vipond for other business than love-making.

"See you, Jack, yonder mob had more sense than we allowed them credit for. 'Gentleman Grimstone' is even at this moment upstairs in hiding."

Jack shot a sharp questioning look at Kitty, and the girl's pride rose.

"Yes, he is hiding in my room," she said with her old defiance.

"Kitty," said her father with authority, "do thou take Mistress Fodderty to bed, for upstairs there is man's work to do."

For an instant Kitty hesitated. Then she put out her hand and led Nancy away. But the light had passed from her eyes. Jack doubted her. She was still under suspicion. Well—

so be it! Yet as she undressed her granny, she listened anxiously for any sounds from above.

"Kitty, protecting that scoundrel?" exclaimed Jack.

"Would you have had her throw him to the wolves?"

"No—but——"

"Be not a fool!" said Vipond sternly. "Remember, yon devil upstairs may have a revolver-shot ready for the first person who comes after him."

Jack sprang forward, but Vipond held him as in a vice.

"Nay, my lad! I am the older man. A bullet in my breast will not hinder the coming of the new generation!" and he gave a low laugh.

"I tell you, I must go!" said Jack struggling.

"Aye, after me!" said the other coolly. "Eh, these hot heads! Hot-headed lads, hot-headed lasses! A fine thing for the old man to damn his daughter to remain single for the rest of her life."

But at the turn of the stair, Vipond bade Jack listen.

They both heard an extraordinary sound of intermittent groaning. The men now pushed forward, and looked into Kitty's bedroom, but it was obviously empty. The groans came from an old lumber attic. They entered, and Vipond held up a light.

All was quiet, but a man was hanging suspended from the roof, his head having been caught by the skylight during an attempt to escape.

It was but the work of an instant to extricate the half-strangled man, now black in the face and senseless.

"He is not dead," said Vipond as they laid him out on the floor. The men looked at one another.

"Shall we let him lie?" asked Vipond coolly.

As Jack looked down at the horrible sight of his enemy in his last thoes, he gripped his hands together, and Vipond saw the fight in his face.

"It is for thee to give the word, Jack. It was thee whom he injured, thee whom he tried to break."

"Do what you can!" Jack broke forth. "Restoratives——" he was off down the stairs.

"What is it?" whispered Kitty. She had closed her granny's door, and she stood there, with only the firelight to show her face.

"Brandy—ale—water—anything you have."

" Yes, yes ! " said Kitty, instantly turning into the capable woman she was. " But tell me——" as he snatched from her what he needed.

" No ! " and he was gone.

Kitty stared into the darkness. Who was this man who dared to treat her with so peremptory a " no " ?

But the efforts of Vipond and Jack upon the prostrate man were at last successful. His breath returned to him, and he was able to sit up and stare.

" You nearly hanged yourself to spare the hangman ! " said Vipond coldly.

Grimstone muttered sullenly and incoherently, and Vipond gave him further stimulant.

" Come now," he said rousingly, " Wolfson and I are no murderers, as you see, but we have a curiosity to know what you propose to do with this last chance—if we let you go ? "

" What do you want ? " he said sourly.

" Nay, it is for you to make the offer ! " said Vipond.

But Jack came nearer, and Grimstone's face hated and feared.

" You will remember," said Jack steadily, " how you stood up to witness against the young fellow who had imagined himself your friend. You will remember when the sentence fell, and he was taken off in chains that you——"

Jack stopped, and Grimstone looked at him fascinated.

" I did nothing ! " he managed to murmur.

" Nothing ! You laughed ! God—how you laughed ! If only you had not laughed ! " Jack leaped up and was gone.

Kitty had, meanwhile, finished her ministrations to her granny, and having brought back the candle, she seated herself in Nancy's chair. But there was no peace for her, but only a miserable debate in her mind and a nervous attention to the sounds from upstairs. Twice she rose and went to the foot of the stairs ; each time she drew back. But presently she was startled at seeing Jack standing before her. His face was ashen, and his eyes stared at her with a merciless intensity, and scarcely knowing what she did, she put her hands up to hide her face.

" Don't ! "

" Kitty—help me—I am—in hell ! "

" Sit down ! " she said. " But I cannot help you ! "

But Jack could not sit down. In his excitement he paced the room, then turned on her violently.

"That man—upstairs—I want to grip his throat like this!" and he made a horrible motion with his hands. "I want to throw him from the window. I want—Oh Kitty—don't you understand? He has kept me for seven long years in hell, and away from you!" He sat down, flung his arms across the table and buried his face.

Kitty rose, and stood uncertainly.

"I cannot help you—I am not good!"

"And he laughed! Seven years ago he laughed! Kitty, ought even God to demand of me that I should forgive a fiend's laugh?"

"Why ask me?" she cried. "Fool—fool—that I was to believe his lies. I can forgive him sooner than I can ever forgive myself!"

"Kitty—what shall we do?" he demanded.

"We can do nothing to that man upstairs. We are not God, you and I, Jack!" and a smile broke across her tired face.

Jack put out his arms, gathered her to him and kissed her passionately.

"Oh Kitty—at last!"

"And what are seven years, when there is an 'at last'?" she mocked.

But Jack, hearing a sound on the stairs, guessed that Vipond was bringing Grimstone down, and went to give him a hand.

Kitty felt a cowardly longing to rush and hide herself, but she managed to stand her ground, as the betrayer staggered in.

"Now," said Vipond sternly, "tell my daughter the truth!"

"Oh—I don't want to know!" exclaimed Kitty shrinkingly, for it was hateful to her to witness this man's humiliation.

"Repeat what I say!" said Vipond sternly, and sentence by sentence he wrung out the confession, while Jack, at a sign from Kitty, came to her side.

"And lastly," said Vipond, "I betrayed Jack Wolfson to seven years in Botany Bay, and I am the greatest scoundrel unhung!"

The man's voice sank lower and lower as he repeated the damning words.

"Well?" asked Vipond, as he ceased.

"Well—what?" asked Grimstone.

"Do we understand that there is no apology?"

A curious expression captured the man's face. It was as though some illuminating secret had been revealed. He lifted his head.

"Scarcely for me to apologise for having been born, the son of a murderer, into a world in which the odds are always in favour of the scoundrel!" He gave Kitty a grave bow. "By your leave, sir!" and opening the door, he was gone.

But Jack started as from a trance.

"Jove—there was something in what that fellow said!"

"His father was a murderer—granny told me. It must be dreadful to have a murderer for a father——," said Kitty.

"A false start," admitted Vipond.

"See Jack," urged Kitty, as he held out a plate and a bottle. "If thine enemy hunger—feed him——"

Jack took the food and drink, and it was some time before he returned.

"God bless you, Kitty!" He did not say that he had emptied his pocket into that of his enemy.

"Come!" and she clung to him. "Let us go out and see the morning!"

"Thee take her, lad!" said Vipond.

"No—I need you both!" said the girl, and leading them to the point where the eastern horizon was waking to the day, she smiled into her lover's eyes.

"Poor little granny! She was right—the golden dawn! Oh Jack, tell me, is there any hope left for the world?"

"At least there are a thousand things which you and I have yet to do for the people."

"You are sure?"

"I am John Wolfson's son. My father died for the people—He passed on the trust."

"Oh Jack—how could I forget?" she exclaimed. "Your father left a letter to be given to you when you were grown up. Poor granny never remembered about it until the other day."

"A letter from my father?" He was deeply moved—as though he had unexpectedly touched a dead man's hand.

"Well, Jack," said Vipond, "I am thinking that Master Dolling will have wearied himself after his lost lodgers, so get thy letter, and follow me as fast as may be. Good-night, lass.

My Kitty—the lass of a thousand dreams ! " and he folded her in his arms.

" Oh, father ! " and she clung to him.

" Come," said Kitty, so soon as her father had gone, and she led the way back to the cottage.

" Kitty, you are a very beautiful woman ! " said Jack, as the girl threw off her cloak.

" I know ! " she said simply.

" There will have been scores to tell you that ? "

Kitty dropped him a mocking curtsey.

" Aye, sir—scores round Bracken Fell have cursed John Wolfson's son ! " Yet, looking into her whimsical face, Jack's lingering doubt vanished.

" And Kitty might ask John Wolfson's son how many had told him over yonder what a handsome lad he is ! " she said drily.

" 'Tis a fair reproof, Kitty. Forgive me ! " he said tenderly. " Do you remember that there was once a little parish child who wanted to let her hair grow as long as she liked. How long did she like it to grow ? "

In a moment Kitty's hands were fumbling, and she let down her hair in golden brown masses about her.

Jack stooped, lifted her tresses in his hands, and for a long moment buried his face in them.

" Jack, but what if I disappoint you ? " she said. " I am—well you see what I am ? "

" I know what you are ! " and he drew out a few letters. " These are not all. I lost some of them ! " and his face hardened.

" I have all yours. They kept me from believing you to be a dream boy, fading away with the years." She gathered up a heavy tress and ran her fingers through it. " There are grey hairs here ! " and she threw him a twinkling smile.

" Kitty ! " and he pressed her to him. " If I love you for the golden brown, I must love you ten times more for the grey."

" Oh, Jack ! " she was threading her fingers through his wavy hair. " Here is a harvest of grey ! "

" I have lived a rough, hard life. I believe I know all there is to be known of cruelty, misery and self-seeking."

" You have found nought save terror ? "

"No! I have found honour and truth and high courage, hanging like shining stars in the blackness. We shall not wake granny?"

"No, granny sleeps the sleep of the tranquil heart. Her storms are all surface storms."

"It was poor granny who kneeled by the waters and drew me to the bank. She used to call me her baby Moses, and insist in her queer prophetic way, that I was drawn back to life to deliver the people from their taskmasters. But, of course —I am not good enough. It needs one of God's true men to do that."

"I wonder what it feels like to be good, Jack?"

"I don't know!" and he smiled into her eyes. "But Kitty, it has come true about the long, long hair, why not about the silver buckles a little girl once craved to wear?" and he drew from his pocket a package.

"Oh, Jack!" she cried, as silver buckles shone in her hand.

Jack watched her, half expecting that she would shower upon him some merry thanks; but, to his consternation, she dropped the buckles in her lap and clung to him in a passion of weeping, and it was as though her whole frame was fighting back the accumulated pain of all the years.

"Throw the miserable things into the river!" he cried.

But Kitty, with a superb recovery, gulped out:

"Oh, Jack! Why did you choose such a little fool as Kitty Vipond?"

"Your tears are more precious to me than your laughter, and I cannot say more than that!" he said tenderly. "But listen, I have something very strange to tell you." and he gave her a detailed account of his visit to Richards, and his struggle to forgive.

But the dawn was catching the lattice, and Jack looked at the old clock.

"You must not go Jack, until——" She left him, and, kneeling by the heavy chest, she raised the lid and found what she wanted.

"Here is the letter!" and she handed him the silk neckerchief in which it was wrapped. "For years poor granny has been trying to remember something your father told her, just before he was captured by the press gang. It came back to her all at once—one night when I was out."

Jack took the sacred packet from her, and Kitty, with a delicacy of instinct, knew that he must read it alone.

XVII

MAJOR RAWBY SUPPORTS HIS FATHER

At the Manor House supper that night there was strong and bitter talk concerning the *fiasco* of the evening. Lord Rawby and his son were present, also the new peer, Lord Bracken, the Honourable George, and the officers of the yeomanry.

"But because an incompetent fellow has played the fool," cried the major, "that does not hinder us from getting some of them yet? Fences were broken, good crops ruined, and we can find witnesses who will swear hard enough, even to catch that elusive woman in white."

"Exactly!" said Lady Mason in her most important manner. "It is time we showed that we are not to be trifled with. You will not let this monstrous matter rest, my lord?" and she turned to her guest, as he lounged in a great chair, somewhat the worse for supper.

"Hang it all, my lady!" and he laughed. "How will you get the farmers to come forward at risk of their autumn corn stacks?"

"Then you mean—you would do nothing?" she asked indignantly.

"Your ladyship should take a white riding cloak and a white horse, and rouse us all to our peril!" said the major gallantly.

"Peril enough!" said Lord Rawby frowning. "These damned reformers are swarming the country like pests, trying to rob us of our rights by their miserable petitions and their seditious meetings."

"The House," and Sir Peter smiled, "takes little notice of the cartloads of parchment which arrive from all quarters, manufactured by busybodies who deserve the pillory."

"Aye, Sir Peter!" said Lord Rawby, "signatures by the million can't be got without a rare lot of mud-digging. I say, 'damn the lot, moderate or radical. How are we to secure gentlemen for the Commons House if every fool is to be allowed to put his cross?"

"We should have had the ringleaders round Bracken Fell

by the heels, if they had not been warned," put in George Strong.

"But who warned them?" asked Lady Mason frowning.

The guests looked at one another, knowing that her ladyship's own son was chief culprit.

"The two men whom we found talking to your son when we rode up," answered the major, "had undoubtedly given warning and scattered the mob. I have been informed that the younger of the men climbed a tree and entertained them to a low seditious song."

"But names—names—If we know names—we can act!" said Lady Mason.

"I forget the older man's name—but the younger one has a voice like the devil himself—if they sing in hell. Jack Wolfson, they called him."

Lord Rawby threw himself back and laughed uproariously. "Bless my soul! Not the youngster who sang like a cherub once—standing by that piano, Sir Peter? How many years ago? But—hanged, wasn't he? No, no—couldn't have been hanged if his voice is—is——" His lordship's reminiscences wavered, and Lady Mason met her husband's startled eyes.

"Yes, that boy was hanged—safely hanged—for a thief!" she burst out, unable to control expression.

"Sentenced, my lady!" corrected Lord Rawby. "Ah—yes—I remember—Heaven and earth moved by your sister Mrs. Ross, and you, sir," and he pointed mockingly towards Sir Peter, "had surely a strong finger in the pie. Came into my head once that the lad was your own—Damme, how time gallops and how one forgets!"

"Yes, it is wonderful, my lord, how one forgets," admitted Lady Mason with a recovered serenity which her husband had every reason to suspect. "And now, may we know what you gentlemen propose as a next move?"

"There ought to be enough to do, when the damned pawns are trying to chase the kings, queens, bishops, knights and castles off the board!" said Major Rawby hotly.

"Aye, indeed," and his father scowled, "and they call the horses they are mounting 'Reform.' When beggars take to horseback honest men—damme—what shall honest men do?"

"Not dismount!" said Lady Mason serenely.

"Right, right, my lady!" and he leaned back rather

sleepily, and mumbled out his sentences. "A dastardly meeting they are getting up in London, with that mountebank Hunt at the back and front of it, and rumour says they are claiming the northerners for Reform, and Manchester—Manchester, ladies and gentlemen, is to be the scene of their next orgy. Vile sedition against the Constitution. God save the Constitution—and confusion to—to—all——"

"And with that fellow Hunt again to the fore," said his son. "Confoundedly smart fellow—Hunt—ought to be on our side—shouting for defence—Constitution. Hates us boroughmongers as a blood-terrier hates a rat. Pretty scheme—thousands of fools to swear in Manchester that they want universal suffrage—ballot—annual parliaments—no corn laws—Hodge and his lordship arm in arm to the poll——"

"And no hustings?" asked Lady Mason incredulously.

"No hustings, no scattering of gold, no drinks—nothing!" put in George, as, rising, he suggested by a look to Catherine that they might find a more private spot.

"That's right—take her away!" said Lord Rawby "What I like to see—Young love—'Drink to me only with thine eyes'—'Kiss in the cup—' We've all been there!"

Catherine made the company a pretty curtsey, and taking her lover's arm, they left the room.

"Of course, my lord," put in the new peer, "We manufacturers are naturally anxious about the corn laws and the cost of living."

But Lord Rawby grunted, and roused himself.

"Must pull together—settle differences behind closed doors—all face the foe—if you can't feed your damned spinners—send 'em to the parish. Agriculture—can't have it undermined—You don't propose to go to Manchester to shout for Hunt?"

"I am no Reformer, my lord, Moderate or Radical," said Lord Bracken indignantly. "Of that his Majesty's Government may rest assured."

"A fine trick that damned Hunt played on us at Westminster this spring," grunted Lord Rawby, as he sank lower in his chair. "We were getting our man returned, as a gentleman ought to be returned, by a show of hands, and the returning officer was going to declare him elected before any one had the wit to demand a poll, when Hunt leaps up like a polecat, drags his candidate on to the hustings by the scruff

of the neck, to demand a poll. Had it all in writing, too—so you see the smart plotter he is ! We had to keep the poll open for fifteen days, with Hunt's candidate winning every day. We let fly all the scurrilous stuff we could rake—about his neglected wife—his connection with those Derby fellows who got themselves hanged, but ' Hunt and Liberty ' was yelled into our ears for fifteen days, and a good Hobhouse was turned down for some miserable Lambe, whom no gentleman had ever heard of ! "

But the maundering voice of his lordship served as a clear signal that the hour was late, and there was a general shifting of chairs.

" If this Manchester scheme comes off, and I hope in all conscience that it does, we must stir up a riot amongst them so that our cavalry may get good practice," said Major Rawby, as he assisted his father to his feet. " Our swords shall go to the grindstone to shave off a few fat slices from the carcass of Henry Hunt, Esquire ! "

The major's joke was doubtless quite excellent, for all laughed, and many swore to be there to see the sight, and now, completely cheered, the company separated.

Sir Peter was sorry to see them go, for he knew that his wife was lying in wait for him. He was right, for the instant they were alone, she made her spring.

" So that boy was not hanged after all ? "

" No—certainly not ! " he returned with coolness. " Who told you that he was hanged, my lady ? "

Lady Mason lost her presence of mind.

" Richards sent me word."

" Richards must have blundered," he said. " The hanging of children, even in those days, was getting unpopular. You were at Bath, if I remember, at the time."

" Sir Peter," she said with a mocking deference, "I owe you an apology. I have altogether miscalculated your brilliance."

" I fancy I have miscalculated yours, Anne. Richards died this evening. It appears that Jack Wolfson was at his death-bed.

" But—why ? "

" Richards wished to make a confession concerning a pair of buckles and a bag of gold."

" What do you mean ? "

"I mean—the wretched buckles were never stolen. They were returned to Malcolm to-day—by Jim. The boy was innocent!"

"Innocent? My God! Peter——"

"It is full late, Anne, for either of us to call upon God."

"But I was sure he was guilty—that—hanging was—the lawful punishment!" Her words came out brokenly, revealing hidden hours of self-torture. Peter was struck with amazement. Must he reconsider his diagnosis of his wife?

"See here, Anne," he said more gently, "Jack Wolfson has probably returned to Bracken Fell with a purpose. He may set inquiries going——"

"Peter," she interrupted passionately, "Why do you keep me in life-long torture? Tell me the truth about John Wolfson's son!"

For one instant the truth fought within him for freedom, but he crushed it back, terrified of the clear purging voice.

"You appear to be so confident that you know the truth, Anne," he answered loftily, "that there remains nothing further for me to say!"

"You admit it?" she cried, rising and standing tremblingly, "then why the mystery? Why have you turned me into a devil—all these years?" Without waiting for reply, she left him.

XVIII

BY THE LIGHT OF A CANDLE

As Sir Peter sat alone, battling with his own soul, he argued that the worst had now happened, and that in some way he would be able to hide from his wife the remainder of the story. He did not know that his son was sitting in his tiny room at Mr. Dolling's, snuffing the tallow candle, that it might give a clearer light.

Jack untied the knots of a red silk neckerchief. But there was fear in his eyes; for his heart was failing him at taking this plunge into the past.

He discovered the pocket book, and undid the strap. Then he took out the thin sheet and turned it towards the light that he might the better decipher the faded writing. It was dated 1793. For one more instant Jack covered his eyes. Then he read:

"DEAR JACK,—Grown up you will be when you read this letter, and I shall be dead, or I should be telling you all I now write. But for safety, I must prepare this letter, for those who serve the People's Cause understand that God alone knows what may befall them.

"Just now, as I write, you are lying in your cradle, and your mother is singing you a lullaby. She is a beautiful woman, Jack. The fairest a man could ever woo. But she has been broken by life and by man, and it is of this I must tell you. You are her son, but though she shall never know it, Madge is not my legal wife. You are not John Wolfson's son. You are the son and heir of Sir Peter Mason, by his legal wife, Madge Preston. Oh, Jack, I am wondering how life has used you and what you are feeling as you read these lines."

There was much more to read, but Jack dropped the sheet to the ground. He blew out the light so violently that the sparks scattered dangerously. Then, standing upright at the window, he understood that a new day was rising upon him. He watched as the glow extended along the horizon, broken by the dreary cottages, but at last the letter on the floor drew him. He must know more—more—everything. Again he lighted the candle.

"Madge was deceived by Sir Peter into the belief that he had seduced her in the common gentlemanly way; and when she was cast off and desolate, I, who had always loved her, took her into my home, and in my home you were born. But something she told me set me wondering, and unknown to her, I went to Gretna Green and there found that Sir Peter had been falsely true. My Madge was his wife. Jack, as she sits there with you at her breast, she is his wife, and never will John Wolfson be her husband, save in name—God helping him. That he swore in his anguish on his way home. For how can I tell her the truth when the squire is now married? If she still loved him I might even risk the pain for her, but, mark you, I have asked her, 'Suppose he and I stood together, to whom would you go'? for my heart craved to know the truth, and she cried out, 'Oh you know! You know, John!' So she is mine, poor weaver though I be, and none shall touch her, and I have promised her that you shall be my son, Jack o' the People, and no aristocrat. Hear the words in which I dedicated you to the cause: 'Take Jack o' the People, O

God ! ' I cried, lifting you up in my arms. ' Make him strong in limb and quick in brain and fearless in heart, till right is done to the People, and the will of God is done on earth instead of the will of the squire, the parson and the bleeders of the land. Amen.' Ah Jack, how you kicked and crowed, and beat your fingers against my cheek.

" But now lad, you are grown up, and here is the paper to prove who you are. If you wish to claim your birthright, it is for you to judge, for it may be that already the People's cause is won.

" God bless you, my lad, as though you were my own, as, indeed, I think before God's throne you are, and therefore I subscribe myself

" Thy affectionate father,

" JOHN WOLFSON."

Jack laid the letter down. At least one sentence forced a tender smile. The sheer optimism of John Wolfson ! Did he really think that in one generation the People's cause would triumph ?

As the wild confusion of ideas advanced upon Jack, he felt that any clear thought or decision was out of the question.

He was at least half an aristocrat. He was heir to great estates. He was John Wolfson's son. He was going to marry Kitty.

Then he leaped up. How could he marry Kitty without telling her the truth ? Complications thickened about him.

He blew out the candle. The glorious summer morning was calling him. The dew would be thick on the turf, and the mists would be untangling themselves from the valleys. Rest was unendurable. He would walk for a thousand miles.

Putting the letter and the evidence of marriage in his pocket, he walked stealthily down the quiet street, making for what country he could find. But the harder he walked, the more he was convinced that the most concentrated thought would never clear his mind.

To his lot had fallen a lifetime of extraordinary variety. Born in a cottage, rescued from the river, passing a wild, irresponsible boyhood with his granny, and then—transported as a thief.

Jack had to confess that the first seven years in Botany Bay

had contained much compensation. The convict law had not stiffened as it had done later, for settlers, and servants to settlers, were badly needed to develop the country.

Through " Mistress " Mary's influence, the boy had been on a practical ticket-of-leave throughout his sentence, being handed over to Vipond, who had taught him his craft, and used him in the development of the land he had taken over. But Vipond had been keen as any father, that Jack should have as good an education as the colony could supply, and the kindly Quakers had helped him with books, and had tried to train him religiously by a method which did not altogether fit in with a temperament so impulsive and artistic as Jack's.

His passionate devotion to music was considered by the good Friends as a falling away to the devil ; but at least his character had been strengthened in its weakest point through the Quaker devotion to duty and truthfulness.

The golden moment of his life had come when Mistress Mary and Mr. Ross had visited the colony, but after that there came blank darkness. With reckless enthusiasm, Jack had refused Vipond's anxious cautions, and had actively supported certain oppressed convicts in rebellion. " Gentleman Grimstone," jealous of Jack's ability and popularity, had set himself to his undoing, and in the end a second sentence had fallen. Jack, in his despair, had proved himself an obdurate rebel, and laid himself open to every horrible discipline the convict system could inflict.

True, on this wonderful morning he was a free man, but it must be in the light of such a past that he must consider this amazing letter.

If his father had been true to his mother, then, instead of being an ex-convict, with all its disabilities, he would be the heir to land which spread out as far as he could see. He would have easy entrance to society, to art, to culture, to politics. With servants at his call he would have been trained to consider the class to which he now belonged, as the " hewers of wood and drawers of water " had been to the Israelites of old, the natural instruments of comfort and glory to their superiors.

It was this thought which flashed him his first gleam of light.

Would he have wished his life to be thus moulded ? Was it God who had torn him from the house of Pharaoh and deli-

vered him into bondage, in order that he might, in very truth, understand.

Would he, in spite of his memories, choose to be the squire's son, or Jack o' the People?

And yet—if he now claimed his right, he might secure position and wealth, invaluable to the cause! Jack glanced at his work-worn hands. He dragged up his sleeve and looked at the scars on his wrists. There were scars on his ankles, there were scars on his back. He smiled grimly.

"Aye, I might have been a fine gentleman at the Manor House, hounding poachers to the hulks!"

Then his imagination advanced to the tragedy of his father's guilt. With an experience stored with crime and hideous fiendishness, he was yet horrified that a father could stand by and watch his own son delivered over to transportation. Jack felt that he had some right to a controversy with God here. He might be expected to forgive Richards, or even the miserable Grimstone, but to forgive his father—still luxuriating in his power to enchain the people! No! A thousand times No! He must one day challenge him and force him to confusion.

Jack had reached a point where he could see the Manor House, enfolded with its gardens and woodlands, and he was looking with a sensitive intensity at the place which might have been his home, when his attention was caught by the clanging of the mill bell.

He turned and looked back towards the village and the mill, and the rows of hideous buildings, and all at once it was as though an indignant child's voice sounded in his ear.

"I hate it! Hate it! Hate it!"

Jack laughed out into the morning.

If he had been snoring in the downy bed of a Manor House nursery he would never have rescued Kitty. They would never have joined together in the sacrament of oatcakes and cold bacon, they would never have plighted their troth. Kitty would never have laughed down into the pool and then laughed up into his eyes.

A whimsical thought struck Jack, born of a homesick yearning after the past, and his own unconquerable boyishness, and he set off at a breakneck pace, cross country to his granny's cottage.

But once there, he proceeded more cautiously.

He trod the weedy paths as though they were cloth of gold, and looked down at the potato patch, with the fork stuck in the ground as the digger had left it, with all the imaginative emotion of a people's poet.

Thus a woman had left her work. He drew out the fork, and cautiously lifted a few plants and set the young white harvest in readiness to carry to the kitchen. Then, afraid of overstepping his stolen authority he looked about him, and presently, with a man's skilled vigour, he was tearing out the weeds from Kitty's border so mixed with sweet-williams, pansies, lavender, snap-dragons and many a sweet-scented herb. Finding an old basket, he loaded it heavily to carry it to the corner where he used to hide rubbish in days gone by. He was arrested by the sober pawing of the dog, who had crept lazily out from under a shed.

"Poor old Pup!" he said affectionately. "Thou hast grown old, lad, and like me, thou hast never found thy name!"

The dog followed as he carried off the basket and emptied it. Somehow Jack was happy that even the rubbish heap had waited for him in the same place. Could there even be poetry in a garden rubbish heap?

"So, Jack," said a voice at his elbow, "you still claim the old home?"

Jack did not turn immediately to look into Kitty's face, but he put out his arm and drew her to him.

"Jack!" and she gave a low laugh. "I waked this morning thinking that after all—you were but a dream; and then I looked from the window and saw you robbing the earth of my potatoes—so now—come in and stir our porridge!"

"I know where the porridge stick hangs! I know where the bowls are set. I wonder—Kitty—is my bowl with the picture of the see-saw still unbroken?"

"Granny has kept it like gold on the top shelf ever since you were taken away, Jack! And I—have dusted it—for fourteen years!"

"And Kitty—what about the fiddle?"

"I have had it hanging in my bedroom," she said flushing. "It wearies for you!"

"Kitty—Kitty!" He kissed her passionately.

XIX

THE LONG DAY

NANCY had her breakfast in bed, and, while Kitty was serving it, Jack pottered about, examining the treasures of the old home.

He handled the books caressingly. John Wolfson's library! Many of them were quite superseded, mere clumsy stepping-stones over which men had passed, and which were now sinking under the tide of the new learning.

Ah, here was one not yet dead. He opened the Bible reverently. It was marked on the margin with rough lines and crosses as the signposts erected by John Wolfson. Here was one heavily underscored. "Who through faith had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea moreover of bonds and imprisonment—of whom the world was not worthy."

Jack bowed his head. This chapter to the Hebrews was Jack's roll of honour. His "father" had always been counted in as one of the heroes of struggle. When the waves had choked him back, and he had thrown over his faith, it was the sense that he was John Wolfson's son which had saved him. A Something had beckoned to him, a Something had resisted the coward weakness which attacks the strongest, a Something had knitted Jack's brain and nerve together for the unknown task.

But the owner of the Bible had visioned beyond the past, and Jack's eye caught another guiding mark. "Seeing then that we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us cast aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us, and run with patience the race—looking unto Jesus, the Author—the Finisher of our faith."

Jack became suddenly conscious of infinity. In that humble kitchen he was standing where the past touched the present, and where the present broke away the future, at every tick of the old clock.

Kitty appeared from the staircase door, carrying the fiddle.

"See, Kitty!" and she leaned on his arm that she might look where he pointed.

But Kitty found no light, only darkness.

"But Jack——" she protested, "All the wrongs in the world seem to be done in the name of Jesus. Don't they open

the Commons House of Parliament with prayer? Don't they fill our churches with war? 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all!' So they cry a thousand times—and they mean—not all—but themselves alone! The poor cry for life, and they give them death and disease—and slavery—and the devil gets his chance with us all!"

"Because we have all disgraced Him, are we to cast Him down from the throne, Kitty?"

"I told you," she said solemnly, "that I am not good."

He took the fiddle from her and unwrapped it from its covering.

"The strings are wonderfully preserved," he said with a puzzled smile.

"Master Dolling has kept the fiddle in order for his poor lost boy. Jack! I have been a monstrous beast to Master Dolling. He also tried to warn me. I must go to him—I must ask him to forgive his headstrong Kitty."

Jack, for answer, laid the bow across the strings, and whispered out Handel's "Largo" at first tenderly and caressingly, and then with all the strength of an infinite triumph.

"When we are married," said Kitty, "we shall always have music!" She came closer, and noticed his wrists. "Jack, the world has wounded you. Will you ever be ashamed of your convict's wrists?"

"Do you remember the high road and the cart, and a little girl in a red cloak?"

"Do I remember the sun in the sky?"

Kitty offered him a radiant, satisfied smile, then darted off to make ready the breakfast.

Jack was healthily rejoiced to scent a meal and to help in its preparation, but amidst all the chatter, Kitty noticed that he did not mention his letter. But she was in no wise worried. Jack was of full age, and she would be neither a fidgetty sweetheart nor a teasing, suspicious wife. But as at last she rose to clear the table, Jack gripped her hand.

"Kitty, I want to beg of you a full day's work in the old garden!"

"Poor garden—you notice that there is work to be done!"

"Work I shall glory in doing! And afterwards—when the day falls away—we will speak of my father's letter."

"As you will, Jack!" she answered. But his manner flushed her cheek, and set her heart beating quicker.

XX

MALCOLM'S HONOUR

THROUGH Midsummer Night Malcolm lay exhausted on his bed, aware that he was in dire disgrace. Yet as he listened to the trampling of horses, the clatter of equipages, the rattle of accoutrements, he thrilled with satisfaction that he had taken a share in preventing disaster.

The plot against the people had cut his pride to the quick, and the outrage against Jack shocked his whole being, and it would be impossible to rest, until he had offered apology and substantial redress worthy of himself. This young man, even though illegitimate, was a gentleman's son. The kings and nobles of the past had recognised that their bastards had at least some claim upon them. If his father's miserable position with his mother prevented straightforward action, then he must do something to wipe out the family dishonour.

Still bent on throwing off his invalidism, Malcolm insisted next morning that Jim should help him to horse; but on reaching Mr. Dolling's, he was told that Jack had gone to Mistress Fodderty's.

"I know the cottage!" said Malcolm to the old shoemaker, and after a merry word or two, Malcolm rode off.

He drew rein, with Jim in the rear, as, on entering the lane, he heard the sound of a rippling laugh.

Looking over into Nancy's garden he saw the man of his search struggling with an irate broody hen, while Kitty, with skirt upturned, was directing the proceedings. He thought he had come to talk to a rising leader of the people, and discovered a boy romping amongst the poultry.

But Jack, hearing the horses, looked up, and raising himself smartly, he let the hen go her scrawking way.

"Good morning, Miss Vipond!" called Malcolm, raising his hat. "I fear I am a disturber of business!"

"Oh—sir!" exclaimed Kitty, hastily dropping her skirt, and making a pretty curtsey. "How good to see you out

again. Will you step in—I mean——" she flushed remembering his infirmity.

"Thank you," he said simply, "and if you can endure so awkward a visitor, I shall be glad to rest in your garden."

Jack helped the young squire down from his horse, and Jim being dismissed, Kitty, with all pride and hospitality, brought out a table and set home-brewed ale and home-baked cakes before her guests. She was about to retire, imagining that the men might wish to talk, when Malcolm put out a detaining hand.

"Stay, Miss Vipond," he urged, "I have nothing to say which you should not hear, and——" he stretched out a white, nervous hand, "I shame that I never thanked you—for what you did for me——"

"Oh sir—I shame that I refused to listen, when——"

"How could you understand, Miss Vipond, that I should be on the side of the people?" he said quietly. "But, indeed, it is of something else I wish to speak. When wrong is done by one generation, it sometimes happens that the new generation can make some sort of amends. Yes——" as Jack was about to protest, "Hear me out, for this is why I have come. Your desire, doubtless, Wolfson, is to help the people to gain their just rights. You are here, in Bracken Fell, for this purpose?"

"And to marry Kitty," insisted Jack.

"I know her faith to you through these years," said Malcolm cordially. "But because of the greatness of your task for the people you will want money, for money is power. I also have had dreams of serving the people, but now——" and he glanced at his leg, "and besides, maimed or whole, the people would never trust me. But you—Jack o' the People I have heard you called—I prayed last night that I might not be jealous of your power and—all you have found. And now—I want to ask a favour of you—I want you to prove that you can forgive—and forget—by accepting the half share of any private fortune I can control—as though we were brothers."

Kitty sat in deep thought. What could all this mean? Again she made a move to slip away.

"No—please—Miss Vipond. I may need your help to persuade," said Malcolm.

"Why did you say what you have said, sir, about us being as brothers?" asked Jack gravely.

"It was an—an expression!" said Malcolm nervously. "It illustrates what I mean. Accept it—and prove to me that you have forgiven my—the older generation, all there may be to forgive."

"All!" broke from Jack's lips.

"You have a right to say that!" urged Malcolm, "but once—how many years ago was it that a lad sang out from the tree tops:

'That man to man, the warld o'er
Shall brithers be, for a' that!'

Would you turn traitor to your own song?" and there was eager light in his eyes.

Jack's mind was in a whirl. How much did Malcolm know of the truth? That he knew something was obvious.

"Sir, it is easier to forgive than to accept——"

"Why will you not understand?" answered Malcolm with nervous impatience. "You will work, lead, struggle, while I—At least let me feel that through you, I have some share in the making of the great future which must—one day—come. You, a son of——" he stopped confused.

"A son of the people," said Jack calmly. "Yet you, sir, of the privileged class, can do much that I can never do. You can take your place in the front rank for Reform. You are wanted as much as I. You cannot hide behind me. We must march together—privileged and unprivileged, so long as we are clear on the one issue."

"March together!" and Malcolm gave a wistful laugh, "and the issue?"

"That all privilege against the common welfare must go!"

"Is that Henry Hunt's aim?"

"Mr. Hunt is not a man of the people," said Jack. "I met him the other day—at Mr. Ross's. He believes there will always be rich and poor, but he is adamant that the poor have their just rights as certainly as the rich."

"And you?" asked Malcolm.

"I have not yet discovered the use of the rich, save to gallop after their own self-interest with greater success than the rest of us!" and his face lighted up merrily.

"Every satirist would corroborate that!" admitted Malcolm readily.

Then, thankful to escape the personal, the two young men

plunged into an animated discussion of the Reform Movement and the political situation.

"Kitty and I hope to go shortly to Sandby," said Jack. "We shall then ride abreast of the great forward movement in England."

"But to do all you wish you must have money," persisted Malcolm. "Look you—I am one of these very borough-mongers the reformers curse—but—I can offer you a seat in the House!"

Jack laughed out.

"An ex-convict?" he questioned. Then as a deep flush surged over Malcolm's face, he added: "When I do go to the House, I hope I shall go by the free vote of the people."

"And yet—even then—you will want money—Won't you share?" pleaded Malcolm.

"Oh, sir, I beg of you to give me time!" said Jack earnestly.

XXI

WHAT IT MEANS

WHEN Malcolm had gone, Kitty sat close to Jack, and put her hand on his knee.

"Jack, need we wait until the evening? Tell me what all this means!"

Jack, for answer, dragged her somewhat roughly from the seat. She felt strangely compelled to submit to his will, even though he might walk with her to the end of the world. By his silence she appreciated how deeply he was stirred.

Out through the paddock he took her, and onward through a wood, and ever his pace increased, as though all sense of control had deserted him.

"Jack," she said at last, with a protecting calmness, "Why must we rush along as though the bloodhounds were on our track?"

"Sorry, Kitty!" and he walked slower.

"I am I, and you are you, Jack," she ventured again. "Why should we take Mr. Malcolm's money? Money will not buy back fourteen years!"

"No! Kitty, I want to get to the quarry where John Wolfson made the speech Mistress Mary told me of. Perhaps there, I can make you understand what you must understand."

"Then let us go, Jack!" said Kitty; and to hide her anxiety she added merrily. "But we shall be trespassers. None but the family are allowed there now."

"Kitty," cried Jack violently, as though she had liberated some torrent in his soul. "Then let us go. I am one of the family."

He removed her tightening grip from his arm, and stood apart from her.

"You mean—Jack—you can't mean that—You are John Wolfson's son?" She stood quite still.

"No!" He well-nigh shouted the word.

"I see!" she breathed. In a flash of illumination she saw so much. Jack, her lover, as he stood with proud aristocratic bearing, flashing the scorn from his dark eyes.

"Your mother—Oh Jack—you mean—she was betrayed by him?"

"Kitty, all day I have been seeking to create a deception. But—I can't do it. I haven't lived for fourteen years away from you to tell you, at long last, a lie!" His eyes looked into hers—his mother's eyes, surely, and never the eyes of the family.

"Come," she said steadyingly, "let us go to the quarry."

They walked on in a deep silence, and presently Kitty pointed to a slab of rock. They sat down, and Jack dug his heels into the soft turf and leaned forward.

"It is not quite as you think, Kitty. Sir Peter Mason married my mother. He is my father. I can claim to be his legal heir—if I choose. When he dies I may become a baronet and take all the land. Here is the proof."

He laid the letter on her knee, and as she read it through, watched her in torture, fearing what she might say.

She breathed a little sigh when she had finished, then looked again as though to remind herself of some sentence.

"See!" and she pointed to the quarry, now a wilderness of tangled undergrowth, "would you not like to have listened as John Wolfson pleaded against what the family were plotting against the people? So—he dedicated you—a babe—to God and the people. I wonder——"

"Yes?" he panted.

"Whether God listened!"

"It is all unbearable!" he groaned.

"You think, Jack, that this is what Mr. Malcolm meant?"

"No—I imagine he looks upon me as his father's bastard."

"Of course, I see what has been puzzling me. You are like the squire—and yet—oh, a thousand times not like the squire, Jack!"

Jack shrank, and then seized her hand as though for strength.

"Don't you see!" he said hoarsely, "He has known all the time. He knew when John Wolfson was pressed. He knew when my beautiful mother drowned herself—Kitty—help me! I want to turn into the biggest devil hell ever bred!"

The girl looked at him with a dangerous sympathy.

"Do! I shan't mind! Don't be good, be wicked, if that will help you. Or if you can't, then I will be a Sataness for you! Why—he knew when you stood in the dock. He knew when you were taken off in the cart. I saw him—as he sat his horse watching before he galloped away. Now I understand." Kitty's tempest of wrath had the desired effect. Jack smiled grimly.

"So you see, it wasn't Richards, it was my father."

"Oh, don't call him that!"

"And now—I live!" Jack's voice hardened again. "And he lives, and the man I have honoured from boyhood as my father—flogged to death."

"Yet you shake your head when I want to be a Sataness!" and Kitty pressed her cheek against his.

"And the worst of all is that this father of mine promoted the Enclosure Bill—to give the people's land as a wedding present to the Lady Anne."

"Lady Anne—Jack—do you think she knows?"

"He must have played her false, too. She may have guessed something—the gold she gave—but not——Oh, what a tangle it is. Let us try to clear our minds. After all, it is no worse to send your own son to Botany Bay in order to save a scene with the woman you have deceived, than to send other people's babies down into the pits."

Kitty was not convinced on this last argument, and shook her head.

"But you will show him up, Jack? Disgrace him before the whole world?"

"What of Mr. Malcolm?" he looked at her ruefully. "You heard him offering me half his wealth—thinking me

his half-brother. Can I round upon him, and take all that he has ? "

" But it is yours."

Jack looked at the girl intently, aware that a puzzling complication might arise if Kitty's ambition suddenly took wing.

" Whatever we do, Kitty, we must do together. If the title becomes mine, then it would be yours also."

" Oh no ! " gasped Kitty, " I belong to the people ! "

" Then where Kitty belongs, Jack belongs ! " and he laughed out in utter relief. " We will bury this letter in oblivion. I will get some attorney to make my name legal. You shall marry John Wolfson's son—as we have promised one another, dearest."

But an unexpected agony of doubt gripped her.

" Oh Jack—wait—Oh, I wish all this had not happened ! "

" But why ? What difference can this make to you and to me ? "

She leaped up restlessly.

" No—don't come ! I want to think—think——"

" We are sworn to one another ! " he warned her. " Kitty, let us drive off to Gretna Green to-morrow ! "

She had gone very white, and spoke unsteadily.

" We must do nothing rashly," she said. " Let us go to see Mistress Mary—Let us win the people's cause in Manchester, and then—if you still wish it——"

" Kitty ! If I wish it ! "

" Oh dear——" she broke off with swift change of subject. " I have been such a horrible creature to poor Master Dolling. Let us go to him."

XXII

EVERYTHING

David and Mary gave Jack and Kitty a very hearty welcome when, some days later, they arrived on horseback at the Sandby studio.

" So the old dream has come true, Kitty," said Mary affectionately, as she led the girl off to the dainty room overlooking the glowing sands.

" Yes," said Kitty.

"I have shared the dream!" said Mary, somewhat surprised at the girl's quiet tone.

"Oh Mistress Mary!" and Kitty gave a nervous laugh. "I was just going to be weak, and I must not be weak!"

"Child!" said the older woman solicitously, "You are completely worn out! Let me look into your eyes."

"No—no!" said Kitty shrinking.

"We shall have plenty of time for good cheering talk!" said Mary lightly, for she was wise enough not to press for confidence.

"And how are Master Donald and Miss Jean?" asked Kitty.

"Away in Wales—and getting terribly grown up. You young people will soon leave us behind."

"I want you more than ever, dear Mistress Mary," faltered Kitty.

"I am proud to know that, Kitty!" she answered brightly. "And the world is so full of work to be done, and that is splendid, after all!"

Mary left her young guest, and as Kitty brushed out her hair and changed to a blue cotton frock, white muslin fichu, blue stockings and shoes with the silver buckles, she won a battle over her weakness. She was, indeed, lonely for some woman's advice, and the first sight of Mistress Mary had made her long to fling her arms about her neck and tell her all.

But when Kitty came into the studio, David looked at her with artistic satisfaction, and handed her to a low divan.

"Now, Miss Kitty," he said genially, "while these others are talking, you and I cannot afford to waste good time. Jack, here, has reminded me that his sketch is seven years old."

Kitty frowned at Jack, and looked shyly at the artist, but David had a trick of winning his own way, and Mary went boldly over to the enemy. So Kitty posed as the artist required, and David sketched eagerly, while Jack told with rough and picturesque vigour the story of Midsummer Night.

"It is so monstrous," admitted Mary frankly, "to feel that it is my own family which allows itself to be connected with such low-down plottings! But tell me—how is my nephew?"

"Mr. Malcolm looks terribly pale and worn," said Kitty. "His limb has been dreadful. He had no business to venture out as he did!"

"I see too little of my nephew," said Mary regretfully.

" But he has written, and he hopes, Jack, that you will not hesitate to tell me everything—whatever that may mean."

Mary's lips smiled, but her face was anxious. Again she was struck with Jack's extraordinary likeness to her brother of the olden days.

" Everything is sometimes a dangerous word, Mistress Mary," said Jack lightly. He stretched out his legs, leaned back, and made certain movements with his fingers.

" Your poor fingers, Jack ! " remonstrated Kitty. " Why do you pull them to pieces ? "

Jack looked down at his hands, then up at Kitty, and laughed.

" It is a fidget I have had all my life. I don't seem able to help it ! "

To Mary the studio suddenly swayed. How often she had twitted Peter about those very movements.

" If Jack is to tell us everything, Mary," said David, as he rapidly worked his charcoal, " he had better make haste, for any moment the ' Tornado ' may sweep down upon us, and then—' I am Sir Oracle, and when I ope my lips, let no dog bark ! ' "

" Mr. Hunt ? " and Jack laughed. " I am longing for Kitty to see and to hear Mr. Hunt ! "

" Hear him ! " said David. " Ah, well, I may chaff Mr. Hunt's foibles, and grieve over at least one personal episode in his life, but I never met his equal for innate generosity and disinterested enthusiasm. Time and again he has drawn the wolves on his track by his reckless support of some friend, or people personally unknown to him. Poor Cobbett has always an eye to his own interest, but Hunt never. Principle, with Hunt, and never diplomacy—the besetment of such men is that they are too swift to judge others, and of necessity they hurt their own elbows."

" And other people's ! " added Mary.

" Exactly. Hunt is probably the best loved and the best hated Englishman to-day, and wherever he goes, the hireling Press vomits out the scandals ! "

" I shall see him this very evening ? " asked Kitty excitedly.

" I hope so, but may I beg of you, Miss Kitty, not to move your head and make those curls dance," said the artist. " He visits a manufacturer named Mr. Johnson, and usually rides over when he can."

There was silence, and Jack, thinking it incumbent upon him to seek to deal with Malcolm's "everything," remarked with an obvious effort:

"At least, Mistress Mary, I am clear of the guilt of stealing Miss Catherine's buckles!"

"So Malcolm tells me!" and Mary's cheeks flushed.

"You tried so hard to trust me, dear Mistress Mary," said Jack with a sad smile, "but I always knew that the doubt lingered in your kind heart."

"Forgive me, Jack," she pleaded.

"And forgive me," said David. "I confess I did think that you had buried them in the garden for Miss Kitty."

"Jack has forgiven Richards—as far as the east is from the west!" said Kitty. "And he has forgiven Grimstone, and now—Mr. Malcolm wants to give Jack half his money——" she stopped, noticing an urgent signal from her lover.

"We must really know everything now," said Mary gravely.

"Mr. Malcolm wishes to treat me as though I were his brother," said Jack. "At first I did not understand. Now I do."

"But why, exactly?" asked David.

"Because," and Jack stood to his full height, "I can no longer be hidden! A dozen times since my return, I have been told that I must be the squire's son. Every tongue in Bracken Fell is probably wagging the same tale."

"You mean," said Mary faintly, as she rose also, "that you have part right to call me Aunt Mary?"

"Nay—I would call you Mistress Mary to the end! Oh Madam, when I consider what you have been to me, and that now—I must hurt you so!" With a natural impulse he bent his knee and kissed her hand. Then rose, turned away, to hide, if it might be, his emotion.

"Children!" cried Mary, "for that is, indeed, what you are to me, have you yet told me everything?"

"The 'Tornado'!" exclaimed David. "I know Old Bob's canter!"

"I must know to-night—before I sleep!" insisted Mary.

"You shall know," said Jack. And Kitty, hearing his promise, breathed out a sigh of relief. Life was infinitely puzzling. If Jack told everything, then perhaps—she might venture to cling to Mistress Mary's wisdom.

XXIII

THE "TORNADO"

THE "Tornado" had poured forth his first torrent, but as the five gathered in the studio after supper it was clear that the tempestuous force was undiminished.

But Mr. Hunt's public enthusiasms did not prevent him from demanding a song from Jack, nor from taking a critical interest in David's sketch.

"You know the people, Miss Vipond?" he asked.

"I am one of them, sir. My father is a blacksmith, and my mother was a weaver's daughter. We were commoners of Bracken Fell until Parliament aided some—to steal our common rights."

"Ah!" he grumped, flinging himself down. "Parliament! What can you expect with 500 seats practically private property? Bought and sold like cheese. Whigs and Tories! Some wiseacre has likened them to rival coaches, bespattering one another with mud—but they are both going the same road."

"And Henry Hunt has ridden in both coaches!" jested David.

"True! True enough!" he retorted. "And may Henry Hunt never be ashamed of climbing down from any coach that is carrying him and his neighbours to perdition. But verily, these coach riders, so long as they can breathe the air on top, care nothing as to the foot passengers they choke with their dust."

"I suppose that the war——" began Jack. But Mr. Hunt whirled off again.

"The war presents us with a vampire debt, gnawing at our vitals, and taxes to pay the confounded interest, and to meet the infamous demands of royal rangers, royal illegitimates and hoary profligates—and the consequence—as any but fools must prophesy—discontent, incendiarism and insubordination." He thrust out his hand as though he were a demagogue at a meeting, "Behold, O England, the rewards of thy victories—while those who have caused thy suffering hold the reins. Every situation of trust and emolument in their gift, and right well do they provide for their own, assisted by that abominable record of wanton extravagance,

the Pensions List—increased to an extent unexampled in the history of nations ! "

" No wonder your enemies hate you, Hunt ! " mocked David.

" And fear me ! " he retorted genially. " Oh what could we not do, if it were not for the stupidity and cowardice of the people ! Nay—stab me not with your eyes, Miss Vipond ! These people submit to laws depriving them of their ancient rights—rights, mark you—for it is the coach riders who are the usurpers of the constitution. And with what art they stimulate the mob to roar against the very men who show them the evidences of approaching ruin. As for the honourable representatives of the people ! " he broke into a contageous laugh, " I once, as a freeholder, demanded the right to ask a candidate a question, as he stood on the hustings. He bluffed and blustered, and swore that he had been an M.P. for forty years, and no one had ever put a question to him ! "

It was impossible not to enter into Hunt's mood, and the little company was bound to laugh with him.

" But Miss Vipond ! " he continued, " the people are improving. They have learned already to cheer ' Hunt and Liberty ! ' It was Hunt who drew curses down upon him for founding a society at Bristol to help freemen to pay their own forty-eight shillings to the Chamberlain."

" I don't understand," said Jack inquiringly.

" Up till then freemen who could not afford the fee entitling them to vote, were dependent upon the bounty of the rival candidates. You can see how that worked ! Our society was denounced as seditious, treasonable, revolutionary ! The Bristol ' White Lion and Constitutional Club ' abrogated to its noble self the sole right to return the member. Well—we are trouncing all that—and in Manchester next month—the wolves are beginning to sharpen their teeth against us ! "

" You seem to enjoy the sound of the grinding ! " suggested Jack.

" I do ! The greater the uproar and opposition the wider my soul wakes. Oh, we are getting on—I assure you."

" You don't drill an army to beat down your foes, then, sir ? " asked Jack.

" Wouldn't the authorities enjoy to get proof that I do ? A few poor weavers in Manchester are certainly drilling—

playing at soldiers I call it—and they have asked me to go and inspect them. No one but a Manchester spy would give me credit for walking into that trap. I have written to the poor fools and done my best to dissuade them from such measures. You northerners are more determined on the blow for the blow than some of us. You are a gritty lot! Our great folk think that weavers should lie down on their empty stomachs and shout with their latest breath, 'Church and the King!' All the same," and he leaped up, "it is folly and madness to use physical violence so long as we have the chance to exert mental force. The authorities know that, and their whole dastardly game is to crush us by fomenting riot. Forewarned, forearmed!'

"And what would be your plan, sir, for us—in Bracken Fell, as part of the Manchester scheme?" asked Jack.

"The sort of question I like!" said Hunt keenly. "In every town and village within tramping distance of Manchester, we must have organisers of contingents. We will have the mightiest gathering ever yet known, and all England shall hear the cry for liberty. But look you, this cannot be done unless bold men and women scorn the opposition of the great. How can we blame these deluded borough-mongers? They see the tide sweeping their sand castles from under them. No wonder they shriek and seize their broom-handles!"

"Still, sir——" said Kitty. "You do think that one day the people will win?"

For reply, Hunt recited in a deeply moved voice, some lines which made Kitty look across at Jack.

> "For a' that and a' that,
> Their tinsel show and a' that,
> The honest man, though e'er so poor,
> Is king o' men for a' that!"

"King o' men!" said Jack. "Yes, I have sung that song before the great of Bracken Fell as a lad, and as a man I broke the hearts of my comrades in chains with it. Is Manchester the beginning of the proof, Mr. Hunt?"

"Nay—we have already begun!" he replied. "We have Hampden Clubs throughout the land. Two years ago universal suffrage was defeated by 106 to 0. Lord Cochrane and Sir Francis Burdett being tellers in support! This month we got 153 Ayes to 58 Noes for a motion to consider the

question next session! Who says that petitions and meetings are without effect?"

"I was in the House," said David. "I was proud of Sir Francis Burdett!"

"Oh—he is coming on!" admitted Hunt.

"Mr. Hunt, I am ashamed of you!" said Mary. "Sometimes I fear you will be left alone in the world. You see the goal so clearly, and off you go cross-country—clearing all obstacles——"

"Or not—dear madam!" interposed Hunt.

"Or not, then! Falling, scrambling up again, getting back your breath, galloping off again—whether the field follow or not——"

"Fair, fair, madam!" cried Hunt. "I weary of those who shout that they hold back, so that they may open gates. I have found so often that when I look round for them, they have stampeded home!"

"Wolfson!" and he turned to Jack. "Pray learn to understand the man with whom you dare to throw in your lot. When he sees the bull's eye, he hits straight, and thinks not to gain his end by aiming to right or left. When he sees something must be done, he cannot sit mumbling and arguing with the loiterers and the puzzle-headed!"

"Still, Hunt!" said David, genially, "allow me to tell you, for the good of your conceited soul, that even you could not have pleaded better for universal suffrage than did the baronet. He scorned a boroughmongering Parliament which suspended Habeas Corpus, while maintaining an unconstitutionally large army to support this monstrous unconstitutional Parliament. He revealed the common tricks of elections, and accused the boroughmongers of making use of the King's authority for their own private ends."

"Good! Good!" admitted Hunt frankly. "I have had my battles with Sir Francis, but at least he knows I never wish him personal affront!"

"No—no, sir," said David deprecatingly.

Hunt looked round on the company with a strange wistful gravity.

"Henry Hunt stands out for no saintship! And there are some things in his life which—but never a man in England has been so misrepresented as he. They go from pothouse to pothouse, crying him down—Why—take yon Derby

incident two years ago, when that unmitigated scoundrel, Oliver the spy, backed by the Government, led a few poor fools to come out——"

"A few poor fools——" so Kitty breathed, gripping her hands. But Hunt plunged on, not hearing her.

"Oh, I know you blame me, Mrs. Ross, for hot-handed fingering of other folk's pies, but what would you? Here were three deluded prisoners up for high treason. None to protect them, and it seemed that Henry Hunt was their last resort. Heavens! I have found a good epitaph for my tombstone: 'Henry Hunt, the Last Resort!' When the world is goaded to despair, nothing left to cling to save poor mad Hunt!"

"I should certainly like to hear your side of the Derby incident," said David, "for it is ever thrown up against you, as proof that you are a man of blood and treason!"

"And so it will be again—even at Manchester," he replied, with a swift overflowing of indignation. "The prisoners were perfect strangers to me. I knew nothing of the business, but I did know that the whole thing was a trick to get some one hanged, in order to justify the Government in having suspended Habeas Corpus. I had just come in from a pleasant bit of shooting when the men's appeal reached me. I received it at five o'clock, and I replied before I went to bed, and called a public meeting on their behalf in my own name!"

"And the Seditious Meetings Act in full force and Habeas Corpus Act suspended. Oh, Hunt!" mocked David.

"Well—I said to myself—'Here are some fellow-creatures in distress. They have not a living soul to aid them, and though they are totally unknown to me, and though I cannot countenance or approve their foolish and wanton proceedings, yet as the law of England presumes that every man is innocent till he is convicted of guilt, and as they have appealed to me, shall I, because there appears to be personal danger and difficulty in the undertaking, refuse or neglect to do my best to obtain a fair trial?' Shall I abandon them because they are poor and defenceless? Without a moment's pause my tongue obeyed the impulse of my heart. Forbid it! Heaven, rather let me perish this instant than harbour a thought so base, so unfeeling and so opposite to every act of my life!"

"So you saved them?" asked Jack. "I also have been within a few hours of the hangman's rope."

Hunt looked at Jack curiously. Then he rose and paced the room.

"No—I did not save them. By barefaced and abominable means, authority secured a tractable jury—all tenants of Lord Derby. There was not the slightest chance. Cross, their counsel, extracted £100 from the miserable beings, then gave them away. His clients were hanged, and he got promoted to a silk gown and King's Serjeant-at-Law. Do you wonder that poor Hunt's horse gallops too hard sometimes?" He pulled out a cutting from the *Manchester Observer* and unfolded it. "Read that!" he said, handing it to Mary. "Even Hunt values a kindly word from a comrade in the battle. But now—I must take me to Old Bob!"

"I will bring him round for you, sir," said Jack.

"Bob and I have won through many a hard bit together!" said Hunt, "and glorious times we have had, too. He is an old horse, as rash for going straight to the post as his master. Perhaps—Mrs. Ross—who knows—we shall go down together!"

XXIV

FROM THE SANDHILLS

When Henry Hunt had gone, the four returned to the studio. The evening was not over.

"And what is this man to mean to you, Jack?" asked Mary curiously.

"It is the cause which matters!" he said seriously. "I have no illusions that only perfectly wise saints struggle for liberty, or where should I be?"

"Yet wherever Hunt goes there is danger!" she replied, testingly.

"Oh—I am glad of that!" exclaimed Kitty.

"Listen!" said David. "A report of an address by the chairman of the Friends of Freedom in Manchester last month," and he smoothed out the cutting Hunt had left with him. "'The patriotism of Hunt is unequalled in the land. He daily hazards his fortune, liberty and life, and notwithstanding all the plots and persecutions raised against him by the enemies of the people, he continues firm as a rock. The public prints have teemed with the most wicked and scandalous falsehoods concerning him, to such a degree that even his

friends did not know what to think of him. I, myself, have been ready to conclude him a deceiver, but his persevering conduct convinces me that he is determined to bear all so that he may promote the great campaign of the people.' "

" Yes," admitted David, " that expresses my own view of this extraordinary man. But I agree that wherever Hunt goes, the vultures will gather ! "

" And who has ever tried to break chains without danger to himself ? " demanded Jack. " Of course—it is clear—that it is not by the breaking of heads that the people will win ; but by being broken until the truth is set free. The Son of Man faced them all—He could have broken the world's chains—but they offered him a crown of thorns—as Church and State and People do to-day. My God ! Why have I never understood all this before ? "

Kitty sat down beside him, and Jack laid a hand in hers.

" See, Mistress Mary," she said. " The marks of the chains ! " and she drew up his sleeve.

" You promised to tell us the rest, Jack ! " said Mary, nerving herself.

" Yes," he replied, more composedly. " It is right that you should hear, even though, heaven knows, I would spare you the pain."

" The pain is neither your responsibility nor your fault, Jack."

" A lie is always a damned thing ! " he said more violently. " I find myself craving after truth as a man in a desert craves for water. If I am to help the world, no lie must lurk in my life, cost what it may to others or to myself. If I am a convict, let the world know it. If I am an aristocrat born, let the world know that also."

" You are quite right, Jack," said Mary.

" The truth is here ! " he said, drawing out John Wolfson's letter. " In this letter, from the man who protected my mother, I read that I am neither his son nor a bastard. Sir Peter Mason is my father, and my mother, Madge Preston, was his legal wife. That is—everything."

Mary reached out her hand to David. She had not realised how totally unprepared she was to hear in plain words such a dire accusation against her brother. Her ashen face showed the strain she was undergoing.

" I see—I understand," she said.

"Oh—Mistress Mary——" Then Jack stopped, knowing that there was nothing he could say to help.

"And now, what do you propose to do?" asked David seriously.

"How can I tell, sir?" said Jack pleadingly. "Neither Kitty nor I really know yet."

"It is all the world, the flesh, and the devil!" broke out Mary with bewildering passion. "My brother was a true man when he married the woman he loved—he was a devil when he cast her off, for pride, for place, for fear of what the family would say. Oh, the monstrosities nurtured in the womb of fear!"

"We are even afraid of being true to ourselves," said David, as he held his wife's hand tightly.

"And so—with Anne to tempt him—he breaks! Man always must break when he fights God and his own soul!"

"Dear Mistress Mary!" said Kitty, infinitely distressed. She sank down on the floor and laid a hand on her knee.

"Children—remember through it all—and he and I were boy and girl together. I cannot forget that!"

There followed a pause, in which no one cared to speak. But at last Mary gave a wan smile.

"At the end of all things it will never be our tendernesses that we shall repent, but only our severities," she said more restrainedly.

"And my wife's pain, Jack, must not in any way control your action," said David.

"Indeed, no!" said Mary, looking at David gratefully. "And there is Anne—perhaps all these years we have misjudged her. Perhaps some doubt has eaten as a canker within her soul."

"Kitty," said Jack domineeringly, "put on your cloak. Come out with me into the evening. I want you."

When Jack took to domineering, Kitty felt no reaction of opposition, but a sense as though some great sheltering influence had arrived between herself and life. She put on her cloak, and together they wandered amongst the moonlit sandhills.

"I wonder," said Kitty softly, "what the world is, and what we are, and whether anything really matters at all?"

"The eternal 'Why,' Kitty, which comes to all real men and women," he replied. "Why must something Sir Peter

has done, and something I may have to do, hurt Mistress Mary? Why should she suffer?"

"Cannot you remain Jack o' the People to the end, and leave all the stupid rest alone?"

"And disinherit my own children, and yours, Kitty, from a great position?" He put an arm about her, as he felt her shrink. "Don't you remember our dream world, when I was to be the prince and you the princess, and you were to be clothed in silks and jewels, and live amongst fresh and scented roses?"

"Oh, Jack—but I am grown up now, and it breaks my heart to think that millions of children have dreamed and will dream again—broken dreams!"

"Life goes on!" mused Jack, "and never a clear cut between the past and the future. There is no shirking possible. You and I, by our actions, determine whether we lift our children into that security where their dreams of power and health and beauty may come true, or whether they be condemned to the struggle which will be their portion—for how many generations? We seem compelled to be little gods over destiny, whether we will or no."

"And we never even asked to be born ourselves!" said Kitty with a rueful shake of the head.

"You regret that?" he demanded fiercely. And for answer she put up her face.

But Mary and David were standing hand in hand on the studio verandah.

"It is, indeed, as though I cannot bear it," Mary was saying fearfully. "That my brother should have travelled for all these years along so broad a road! Tell me, do you consider that Jack ought to establish his claim and break up the family?"

"It is broken already, dearest. You know that happiness drifted away from the Manor House long ago."

"Yes," she agreed.

"And a future Sir John Mason might find many arrows in his quiver for the people's cause."

"But the people need leaders of their own class—I mean men and women who can understand as we can never understand."

"Dearest!" he exclaimed, his real passion breaking through his habitual reserve, "I see nothing save a hell of a

struggle for the people for generations. If in Jack and Kitty they can win champions—but no—we must be on our honour not to prejudice them in the least degree."

"Oh, listen!" exclaimed Mary.

A glorious voice was singing out under the stars, and two forms could be distinguished against the skyline. Had Handel ever before such a concert hall?

"He was despised—rejected—a Man of sorrows—and acquainted with grief."

They listened. The song ceased. There was nothing they could now hear, save, curiously, a breaking ripple of laughter from Kitty.

"All I can wish for those two children, David, is that they shall be as happy as we have been, and that their children, like ours, may grow up keen to serve as God may command."

"Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill made low, the crooked straight and the rough places plain!" Again the music dominated.

"Jack o' the People had better turn himself into a professional singer," said David. "It is to art we must all bow in the end!"

XXV

THE NEWSMONGER

On a certain afternoon in August, Lady Mason noticed at once that Major Rawby was full of news. She expressed the politest regrets that her husband was not there to receive him, but hoped that she might be able to serve him.

"My dear Lady Mason," he protested gallantly, "you will pardon me on behalf of your husband for suggesting that you are His Majesty's most patriotic supporter in the whole county of Northshire!"

"Nay," and she smiled, "you flatter me at your own expense, major."

"I am but a messenger, my lady, of news concerning these Radical reformers who would rob us of our rights. I, for one, do not mean to see my own family robbed of the seven seats under our control, without lifting a good right hand. They presume to hold their seditious meetings everywhere—London, Birmingham, Stockport, Blackburn, Oldham, and now—what think you of this?" and he handed for Lady

Mason's inspection an ill-printed handbill calling upon the people to march in their thousands to St. Peter's Fields, Manchester, on August the 16th.

"But cannot this be stopped?" she asked eagerly.

"I am happy to say His Royal Highness has issued a proclamation which should cover all such meetings," and he read out with gusto from another paper which he unfolded.

Generally, it was a charge of sedition and treason against all who presumed to bring into contempt the Government and the Constitution as established by the Commons House of Parliament. The chief crime detailed was the attempt which had been made at public meetings to choose persons to sit in the House without being lawfully elected.

"Is that the plan at Manchester?" asked Lady Mason.

"Unluckily that shrewd devil Hunt is against the notion. But they did it at Birmingham! They declared that they were tired of sending petitions to lie on the table, so they would send Sir Charles Wolseley, a fellow of eighty, who could not be laid down so lightly."

"Vastly amusing!" commented Lady Mason with a laugh.

"It is more than amusing, by your ladyship's leave!" replied the major, "if I may have your ear to our orders. 'Charge all Sheriffs and Officers to use their best endeavours to bring to justice all persons who have been or MAY be guilty of uttering seditious speeches and harangues, and all persons concerned in any riot or unlawful assembly, on whatsoever pretext they may be grounded, not only contrary to law, but dangerous to the most important interests of the Kingdom. Given at the Court at Carlton House, 30th July.'"

"England, and her most important interest in 1819?"

Major Rawby turned at the sound of the quiet voice, and could not sweep from his expression his annoyance at seeing Malcolm.

"I hope I am not a spoil-sport, Rawby," he said pleasantly, and he came forward on crutches and seated himself.

"On the contrary, you may be interested to hear the kind of work upon which your friends are engaged!"

"You are at least well armed with documents," said Malcolm with a laugh.

"Take no notice of Malcolm, major," said Lady Mason rallyingly. "We must ever give privilege to a patient."

"Yet some patients have wonderful powers of recovery

when occasion demands it ! " mocked Rawby. " But here is the official announcement of this latest Manchester scandal—enough to prove the subtlety of those with whom we have to deal. For, mark you, first they get a widely signed requisition from householders to the magistrates to call such a meeting, then, when the magistrates very properly make no reply, they issue the following :

" ' To consider the propriety of adopting the most LEGAL and EFFECTIVE means of obtaining REFORM in the Commons House of Parliament, and the Magistrates having declined to call such a meeting, therefore the requisitionists give notice that a Public Meeting will be held in the area near St. Peter's Church for the above mentioned purpose, on Monday the 16th. Chair to be taken by Henry Hunt, Esquire, at 12 o'clock.' There follow a number of names of whom no one has ever heard ! "

" Monstrous—scarcely to be believed in these days ! " admitted Lady Mason. " But what are you going to do ? "

" See to it that Henry Hunt, Esquire, does not stay long in the chair ! " he sneered. " The magistrates mean business, and so does Nadin, the deputy chief constable, and so do we ! "

" We ? " put in Malcolm, as he poked tobacco into his pipe.

" We ! " retorted Rawby. " The Manchester Yeomanry, the Prince Regent's Cheshires, the 15th Hussars, the 88th Foot, the Royal Horse Artillery——"

" And all against a crowd of men, women and children ! Your fellows will have opportunity for excellent sport. My poor powers will be dedicated to stopping it ! "

" Malcolm ! " said his mother deprecatingly. " It is not for a Mason to turn traitor to the Constitution."

" We boroughmongers, mamma, may have secured our own convenience, shall we say, but no historian would claim that we are constitutional. These people who claim for ' no taxation without representation ' stand in a strong position. By the Constitution, peers and their following have no right to dominate the Commons House, and every man has as much right to his vote as the peer to his seat, or the King to his throne. They are all equally held by the tenure of the Constitution ! "

" And when, pray, did you begin to follow the profession of law ? " asked Rawby.

" Law ! " and Malcolm smiled. " Facts which every Eton boy ought to know."

" Facts biased, doubtless, by your attendance at meetings conducted by a handsome ex-convict and his disreputable female companion ? "

" Disreputable—how ? " asked Malcolm, with dangerous composure. Lady Mason laid down some needlework.

" Well—I understand the girl has been brought up by some old witch-hag, from whom, doubtless, she has learnt alluring tricks. I would not distress yet another victim of the lady's blue eyes and entrancing hair ! " he broke off with an insolent bow.

" Miss Vipond happened to save my life. That is not an act which a gentleman cares to forget ! " said Malcolm hotly. " And as for the ex-convict as you call him——" but a sudden wild look from his mother stopped his mouth.

" This fellow is stirring up sedition—that is enough for me ! " said the major confidently.

" Sedition ! " Malcolm laid hold of his crutches and struggled upright. " Why mistake hunger for sedition ? Common human hunger, that would stir you to violence within twenty-four hours ! What is your language when your dinner is late ? Is there anything you have ever wanted that you have been unable to get ? I tell you the people are being goaded to madness ! Recall how they were tricked to patience by talk of what the all-glorious war would bring them. God in heaven ! What has it brought them ? Seven shillings a week and the quartern loaf at one shilling and three-pence. And taxes ! I also gather my documents. Listen to this, from a public newspaper. ' These taxes cut off from the poor all those little gratifications and indulgences which an Almighty God meant for all. Is it to be supposed that a mere subsistence upon meal and water will ever attach a man to his duty, when his utmost and most incessant exertion will not afford a penny for a cake for his child, or a quid for himself ? So long as we put out of reach of the people these simple amenities, we reduce them to despair, and they are ripe for any mischief, and ready for any crime ! ' "

" We are to be burnt in our beds so that these rascals may eat and drink and be merry ? " demanded Rawby.

" It is we who eat and drink and try to be merry ! " said

Malcolm rather wearily, " and the rascals who lack even the beds. You would agree with these lines perhaps ?

' Ye wicked weavers of Carlisle
Who can't on empty stomachs smile,
Nor live on empty air.' "

" Oh, Malcolm," exclaimed Catherine, as she came in with George behind her, " what monstrous rudeness are you reading ? " She took the paper from his hand, and continued scornfully :

" ' Are things then come to such a pass
That blasphemy consists, alas !
In hunger, craving bread ?
Perhaps these philanthropic souls
Would have ye die like rats in holes,
Or hang ye up, till dead !

Or do they follow Malthus' creed
Which says starvation must not breed,
So starve the vulgar folks.
In manly terms demand your right,
Nor cease demanding, day and night,
Till you've obtained redress ! ' "

Catherine tore the paper across and across.

" So much for low nonsense," she said merrily. " But I have great news ! Nancy's Jack, as the people call him, is to deliver a discourse, sermon, or rant, on the common to-night. You are going, are you not, George ? "

" One may as well learn all the confounded mischief going ! Those who shout for Reform at Manchester may find that they shout for work when they return ! "

" Reform is inevitable, one day, George," said Malcolm. " Personally, I would prefer to advance with my age than lag behind it."

As Malcolm left the room, the others looked at one another.

" Bet you my last guinea, George," said Rawby, " that he is going to take the chair for this Nancy's Jack."

XXVI

MASTER DOLLING'S TREE

Life was growing very full and fragrant to Jack and Kitty as they worked hand in hand for the great cause. Until after

the Manchester meeting, they had decided to let their own lives drift, but the currents bore them so closely together that it seemed impossible that any power should force them apart.

The people's bitter disappointment of Midsummer Night, united with the return to the old hopeless routine, had been partially allayed by the arrival of Vipond and Jack.

These men, independent of any local employer, with their wide outlook and confident belief in the rightness of the cause, renewed hope, and offered comfort through their deep sympathy with the dull despair around them.

On this evening, when the mill gates were unlocked at eight o'clock, the toilers staggered forth to spend what remained of the night under Master Dolling's tree. For the old oak still preserved its name, even though it was long since the Methodist shoemaker had been able to fulfil his Sunday duty.

" The Lord bless you, my children ! " said the old man on this evening. " The sheep stray, hungry and cold and shepherdless, and I pray that you and Kitty——"

" Oh, Master Dolling ! " pleaded Kitty, " leave out Kitty—a poor shepherdess, too foolish to lead ! "

" Aye, well, lass ! He knoweth that we are dust, and a rare good job that is, or some of us must never dare to lift head again. So give the folk Master Dolling's love, and tell them that there is never a night but he wrestles in prayer that the dawn may come."

" I will tell them ! " answered Jack.

" And sing them a bit o' good Charles Wesley, lad !

> ' From strength to strength go on.
> Wrestle and fight and pray.
> Tread all the powers of darkness down,
> And win the well-fought day ! ' "

" You see, Kitty ! " said Jack, as they hurried off. " So it goes on—the wrestling—the race-endeavour ! "

" We always seem to be in the middle of the race, and never at the end ! " said the girl wistfully.

" But we are together ! " said Jack softly. " Oh, Kitty, if you but knew the pride in my heart for the girl who has been faithful, ever since she cried out to me from the old parish cart ! "

It was growing dusk, and the long shadows walked like

giants beside them. When they reached the tree they found a good crowd gathered, and Vipond, passing from group to group, was urging that at last trouble was breaking. But they had been deceived so often, and many a one shook an unbelieving head.

Kitty was infinitely touched to notice their personal loyalty to herself. Consumed with self-distrust, she found trust pouring out upon her, and all established a claim to share in the romance which they saw working out before their eyes. As she and Jack came into their midst, an exhilarating cheer burst forth, and hands were offered on all sides.

Vipond was just speaking to Jack as to the conduct of the meeting, when a movement of the crowd drew attention to the fact that Mr. Malcolm was riding towards them, accompanied by Jim.

A breathless silence ensued, for none knew what this might portend. The people made way as he approached Jack and Vipond, and watched his eager manner with concern. Then they smiled as he greeted Miss Kitty, and were all amazement when they saw him dismount and take his crutches from Jim.

"My friends," called out Vipond, "Mr. Mason has agreed to take the chair for us this evening." The one instant of startled pause was followed by prolonged clapping and cheering.

Malcolm was much discussed in Bracken Fell, for he had long puzzled the people. But now, standing before them, lamed as one of them might have been lamed, by the hated action of a landowner, they pressed close. Surely the dawn must be breaking when the squire's son came amongst them.

Malcolm smiled, genuinely gratified at their welcome, and, leaning against a tree, he returned a crutch to Jim that he might have one hand free.

"Well, friends, for such I hope I may call you ('Aye, aye'). You know me best as the squire's son, and some of you have brought me rare specimens of plants for my collection. But to-night we are here on serious business, and I want you to listen to some one far more competent than myself. I have been lying up at the Manor House in my pain ('Curse them keepers'). Don't let us curse any one to-night! I have thought and read much, and I can now tell you that it is against the ancient law of England for any of you to pay one farthing in taxes unless you have the power to send to the Commons House of Parliament the men whom you choose.

"I have come to-night because I want you to understand that you are within your constitutional right to claim this vote; that you are therefore neither lawless, rebels, nor seditious in doing so ('Bless your honour!'). Many would keep you in ignorance of your right. I am not amongst them. But now—listen to your Jack—Nancy's Jack, I think you call him! ('It's t' squire who kens best who Nancy's Jack is!')."

But the last interrupter was violently quenched by his neighbours, and Jack, coming forward in response to a nod from Malcolm, was received with wild greeting.

"Jack! Jack o' the People! Stick to us, Jack! Give it us plain! No long words, my lad! Thoo's a proper Bracken Fell lad! Three cheers for Bracken Fell! Three cheers for Bishop's End!"

So cheers and counter-cheers rang out from the enheartened crowd, in which the shrill treble of women and children took a share. But at last Jack put up his hand.

Jack avoided long words, and for half an hour he kept his audience spell-bound, as he explained to them their condition, their helplessness and industrial degradation. Such mysterious expressions as reform, universal suffrage, ballot, grew in vision before them, and finally he set forth a clear statement of the Manchester plan.

"So, lads and lasses!" he cried gaily, "we must let Bracken Fell take its share, and I hope a good fifty of us will go."

"Why not t' lot?" the question was eagerly repeated. Jack laughed.

"Any one of you who can tramp a good dozen miles will find plenty of room in St. Peter's Field!"

"We will empty t' peer's mills for him!" shouted one.

"And we'll clear t' pits and go to 'play' in Manchester!" cried a jovial collier.

"Aye, we'll have a grand 'stick-out.' It is the lot or none, and then no master can do nowt!"

"As you will," cried Jack, "but whoever goes must understand that he or she is under the leadership of Harry Vipond."

"Right! Right! He's a good 'un! He's a straight stick."

"Miss Vipond and I——"

"Three cheers for his lass!"

"Let me get on," pleaded Jack. "The night is too dark

for me to shake my fist at you! Kitty will go with you, and you must help to carry the banner she is making. I shall meet you in Manchester!"

"And what is to be on t' banner?"

"Bracken Fell and Bishop's End demand annual Parliaments, universal suffrage, the ballot, repeal of the Corn Laws, liberty for all!"

Jack put up his hand to stop the tempest of acclamation. "And remember, no sticks, no stones! Head breaking will get us nowhere."

"If any lad touches me he'll get a bat on his nob to make him wish he hadn't, Jack!" shouted a collier, leading a laugh.

"See here, lads!" said Jack, becoming serious. "Mr. Hunt and the Manchester Reformers are on their honour to bring off this meeting in peace, as a great message to the whole country of the justice of our claims. You will play into the hands of the enemy if you raise a hand. A riot is what the Government wants—don't play their damnable game for them!"

"Strong language!" whispered Rawby as he stood in the shadow with the Honourable George. "We are just in time."

But Jack had noticed their arrival, and he continued imperturbably:

"Aye, lads, those who use the sword will perish with the sword. If every yeomanry officer round Manchester gave the order to cut us down, if we lay on St. Peter's Field, dead in our own and our neighbours' blood, it would not be we who would perish. Let the boroughmongers keep their swords—aye—till we go down into the dust at their feet—but boroughmongering is doomed! A Roman soldier fleshed his spear in the side of the World's Deliverer! But the Deliverer is not dead! He lives—and one day—when we offer Him the crown—He will reign!"

"So that is the famous Jack!" whispered Rawby. "Religious, by Jove! On the wrong side—damn him!"

"And friends," cried Jack, as the applause died away. "I forgot to tell you that Mistress Mary will be in Manchester."

"So the dastardly treason thickens!" muttered Rawby. "Anyhow, George—I have won my bet!" and he peered

through the gloom. "Hand out that guinea. A fine brother you are winning!"

"I never accepted," said George morosely, as he plunged a reluctant hand into his pocket. "Come along—they are breaking up. Best to clear out before we attract their attention. One never knows with these fellows——"

They turned off smartly, for it was better to reserve themselves for some bigger and safer future.

But the crowd, eagerly talking and cheering, did not notice the sound of a chariot and four horses coming along the rough road which skirted the common, until they saw the lights, and heard a loud voice raised angrily:

"Into them! What are you pulling up for!"

There was a terrified scream from a group of women, then the horses' heads were seized by some of the men, regardless of postillion whips.

"Sit down, sit down, my lord!" exclaimed Sir Peter, as he tried to persuade Lord Bracken to calm himself.

"Sedition!" shouted the peer. "Caught red-handed! Fools! Not a man who goes to Manchester will ever again work in my mill!"

A wild shouting and groaning greeted the new peer's awkward and ill-timed threat. But at least he showed a reckless courage in uttering it.

"Lads!" shouted Jack. "Let them go!"

But the rush to the chariot was not so easily broken, for in spite of Sir Peter's urgent remonstrance, Lord Bracken seemed set upon challenging the people.

"I am not afraid!" he blustered. "I'll say it again! No hands shall touch my work again who go to that confounded Reformers' meeting!"

"Three cheers for Hunt and Liberty!" came back the swift, excited retort.

But Jack, fearing that mischief might undo the good of the evening's work, seized one of the chariot lamps and held it up to his face.

"Get home, lads! Vipond, send them home!" The leadership had passed to the younger man, and Vipond, obeying, rushed forward to persuade the men from the horses' heads and the anxious postillions to reason.

"My lord!" said Jack coolly, "that cruel threat was the threat of a tyrant!"

"Sit down, my lord. In God's name, let us go!" cried Sir Peter. But Lord Bracken pushed him back.

"And who may you be to have the insolence to call me a tyrant?" he shouted.

"Who am I?" Jack spoke slowly, as his eyes were fixed on the shrinking face of his father.

"He is John Wolfson's son!" shouted a voice from the crowd. "Son of the man you got pressed and flogged to death on a man o' war!"

"Three cheers for John Wolfson's son!" so the people clamoured.

"Your lordship will remember John Wolfson?" said Jack sternly.

The mill-owner did remember the obstinate weaver whom he had pushed out of the path of his ambition. He gazed as though benumbed at the accusing eyes, set in that strong young face. Something seemed to grip his throat. He fell back against Sir Peter, uttering a choking sound.

"Father, can't you get him away?" so Malcolm appealed, as he struggled forward. Then he stopped, seeing what he did.

But Jack, thundering an order to the crowd to keep back, called imperatively for Kitty, and they made instant way for her.

"Kitty! Adam Strong is ill. Help him!"

"Oh, Jack!" Kitty looked incredulously into her lover's eyes, but could find no wavering in the command.

"Miss Vipond is skilled," said Jack bluntly, as he flung open the chariot door. "She will understand how to help."

Kitty stepped up, professionally alert.

"Take the seat behind, your honour!" she said to Sir Peter. "I must have room."

Then Kitty tore away the fine lace and cambric from about the man's throat, and laid him back as well as she could, and commanded the postillions to drive with all speed to the "Fur and Feathers."

There was no hindrance now, as Jack sprang to the step.

Sir Peter sat quiet, altogether amazed at the circumstances in which he found himself, neither daring to speak nor to offer help.

"Jack," said Kitty presently, "it is no use—— He is

breathing out his last breath," and she put a strong arm under the dying man's shoulder.

It was but a short distance to the "Fur and Feathers," but it was not short enough for Adam Strong. Death was in a hurry. There came a violent wrenching spasm. Then quiet.

"He is dead, Jack!" Kitty said.

Jack swung himself over and laid the dead man back from her. Then he called to the postillion to stop.

"We have done all we can," he said, as he helped Kitty out.

"Your master is dead," he said to the postillion: "Take him home."

He put a tight arm about Kitty, as he felt her stagger. The postillions whipped up the horses, and the chariot rolled and jerked away.

"Oh, Jack! How could you make me do it?" and Kitty broke into low sobbing, as she buried her face against his shoulder.

"Dearest—beloved—I had no right—it has been too much for you!" he said, seeking to soothe her. "I don't know why I acted as I did. It seemed the only thing to do."

But Sir Peter, superstitiously terrified at being whirled off with the dead peer, was thankful indeed to hear George's gruff voice through the darkness, speaking to the postillion.

"Is that his lordship? Has he seen the rascals?"

The horses were pulled up once more. Sir Peter leaped down from his seat.

"George!" he cried feverishly, "your father is in the chariot. He is dead!"

For a moment the son did not speak.

"Heavens—so soon!" muttered the new peer.

XXVII

TO MANCHESTER

David and Mary, having determined to stand by the Lancashire Reformers, invited Jack and Kitty to accompany them to Stockport, to take part in Henry Hunt's reception on his arrival from London.

Fierce controversy had raged by tongue, Press and poster. The original meeting, arranged to be held on the 9th, had

been forbidden by the magistrates as illegal, owing to the inclusion in the programme of the election of a "Representative," as had been done in Birmingham. The Reformers had bowed to the decision, and Hunt, considering such an attempted election as not only illegal but foolish, had seen that the resolutions for the 16th were restricted to the demand for annual Parliaments, the ballot, universal suffrage, and the repeal of the Corn Laws.

But the effect of the magistrates' opposition had been to increase the excitement, and as Jack and Kitty, eager to see all there was to be seen, sallied out from the "Bulkley Arms" on Sunday morning, they were astounded to find the whole thoroughfare jammed with a massed crowd which extended for a couple of miles.

"Look at this!" cried Kitty enthusiastically. "We don't know that we are born in Bracken Fell!"

"He is coming! Hunt is coming!" shouted the populace, and from the distance they could hear the applause as it grew in strength.

"They could not crowd more, even to see a king!" said Jack. He had an arm about Kitty, and to save her from the press, he managed to get her up the steps of a house. In a few minutes they were well rewarded. The chaise appeared. Hunt, uncovered, responded with a face alight with confidence, gratification and kindness, by bowing and smiling and waving his hand.

"God bless you! God prosper you! Hunt for ever! Hunt and Liberty!" so the crowd reiterated.

Hunt rose in the chaise, just as it passed Jack and Kitty.

"Friends!" he shouted, in a clear ringing voice. "Remember that to-day is the Sabbath Day. Quiet! Quiet! No tumult on the Sabbath!"

But even Hunt had no power to subdue the enthusiastic acclamations as the crowd pressed on to the Union Rooms, where Hunt alighted. The idea that he could escape speaking was purest nonsense.

"You will have to give them a word or two, Hunt, or we shall never get the crowd away," urged David Ross.

"I think," said Kitty, as she stood in the thick of the crowd, "that the cries after Hunt are the breaking out of a people's despair. See—" and she sank her voice, "their tired, sunken faces—their eyes—their clothes—no wonder——"

But it was apparent that Hunt was about to speak, and breathless silence fell the instant he raised his hand.

With a happy geniality he thanked them for their welcome, then entreated them to go away peaceably.

"Get to your homes to-day, my friends!" he urged. "Let us not give our enemies any chance of censure. Our time will come, if any of you can walk as far as St. Peter's Fields!"

With loud laughter and gaiety the people responded, and the crowd melted away.

"Extraordinary!" observed Jack. "He can mould a crowd as a potter moulds his clay. No wonder certain persons hate and fear him."

But Monday was no Sabbath, and the crowds re-assembled in unabated excitement to escort their hero to Manchester.

Enthusiasm reached its climax when it was discovered that Sir Charles Wolseley, the veteran Reformer of eighty, who had been elected representative for unfranchised Birmingham, had arrived to support Hunt.

The procession formed, with Hunt, Sir Charles Wolseley and Mr. Johnson, the manufacturer, in the forefront, and David and Mary, Kitty and Jack were in one of the chaises following behind.

The whole progress was one massed orgy of enthusiasm. Ringing cheers for "Hunt and Liberty" echoed and re-echoed not only from the pavement, but from the crowded windows *en route*. It was not until they reached an open space by St. Michael's Church that Hunt addressed the people, in a speech which could be summed up in a letter which he afterwards circulated widely.

"You will meet on Monday next, my friends," he urged, "and by your firm and temperate deportment, you will convince all your enemies that you feel that you have an important and imperious duty to perform. The eyes of all England and all Europe are fixed upon you, and every friend of real reform and rational liberty is tremblingly alive to the result of our meeting.

"Our enemies will seek every opportunity by means of their sanguinary agents to excite a riot, that they may have a pretext for spilling our blood, reckless of the awful and certain retaliation that would ultimately fall on their heads.

"Every friend of real and effectual reform is offering up to

heaven a devout prayer that you may follow the example of your brethren in the Metropolis, and by your steady, patient, persevering and peaceable conduct on that day, frustrate their hellish and bloody purposes.

"Come then, my friends, to the meeting on Monday, armed with no other weapon but that of a self-approving conscience; determined not to suffer yourselves to be irritated or excited, by any means whatsoever, to commit any breach of the public peace.

"Our enemies have not attempted to show that our reasoning is fallacious, or that our conclusions are incorrect, by any other argument but the threat of violence, or to put us down by the force of the sword, the bayonet and the cannon.

"They assert that your leaders do nothing but mislead you and deceive you, although they well know that the central principles of truth and justice are too deeply engraven on your hearts, and that you have become, at length, unfortunately for them, too well acquainted with your own rights ever again to suffer any man or any faction to mislead you!"

"I wonder!" whispered Kitty to Jack. He nodded grimly.

"We invite any of the nine wise magistrates!" went on Hunt genially, "who condemned the first meeting, and any others, to come to our meeting. If we are wrong, it is their duty as men, as magistrates, as Christians, to endeavour to set us right by argument and reason. We promise to give them an attentive hearing, and to abide by the result of conviction alone. But once more, friends, we despise their threats, and abhor and detest those who would direct or control the mind of man by violence or force. So, friends, we meet again!"

Hunt's face shone with the frankest delight at the ovation he received.

"He is vain!" commented Kitty. "But I like him!"

"Vain and brave, egotistical, yet disinterested! A curious combination. Built perhaps thus, to enable him to pioneer where wiser men, so called, would never venture," said Jack.

"You speak sadly," said Kitty.

"No—no—only——"

"I cannot bear there to be an 'only,'" admitted Kitty. "But we must find the chaise again. We are to go to Smedley Cottage for supper. Mrs. Johnson has invited us

to meet Mr. Hunt. I cannot believe that some one named Kitty Vipond is really going to enjoy such an honour ! "

XXVIII

SIR PETER CANNOT REST

THE visit to Stockport and Manchester had undoubtedly opened Jack's and Kitty's eyes to the wider meaning of what was happening. Here was no enthusiasm raised at the will of a few eccentric leaders. A living movement was born, conceived of the suffering and growing exasperation which was attacking, not only the poor, but many traders who were discovering themselves to be the sport of an unrepresentative Government, whose chief object was to conduct public affairs to its own political and private advantage.

The broad fact stared that Manchester, Salford, Bolton, Blackburn, Rochdale, Bury, Ashton-under-Lyne, Oldham, Leeds, Middleton, Holmfirth, and many equally important places, including Birmingham, returned no member to the Commons' House of Parliament, and the awakened inhabitants were determined that this disfranchisement should cease.

" We are amongst the lucky ones in Bracken Fell ! " said Vipond, as Jack and Kitty sat in Dolling's parlour discussing their adventures. " Sir Peter Mason has forty-nine freeholders to share his largess ! "

" And when we get five thousand electors in a constituency, even Tories will find their purses growing shallow," said Jack thoughtfully.

" When we block them of one trick, they will find another—make no mistake about that ! " said Vipond.

" Poor granny cannot understand about this vote," said Kitty. " All she wants to know is whether the Lady of Bracken Fell will ever again ride round the common ! "

It was partly owing to Nancy's weakness that Dolling's back shop became the general consulting room, and the old Methodist, happy once more in his fellowship with Jack and Kitty, was keen as any boy that the contingent from Bracken Fell should worthily represent this great cause.

The sudden death of Lord Bracken had undoubtedly eased the situation. A sense of awe prevailed. From mouth to mouth the news had passed that the mill-owner's last words

had been a threat to close his mill against any who went to Manchester.

"The Lord," pronounced Dolling, "hath listened to the vain words of the wicked, and hath appointed that Adam Strong shall never again pass through his own mill gate. It is written 'He shall break in pieces the oppressor,' and, glory be to His name, it is also written 'Surely oppression maketh a wise man mad!'"

The new peer was also superstitiously moved by the circumstances of his father's death. He decided that until he had time to "look round" he must be careful not to involve himself in any rupture with his workpeople. He let it be noised abroad that any who wished were at liberty to join the procession.

Thus the scheme gathered its strength, and Jack gained a devotion which would have sent many to the stake, had he chosen to lead them there.

The peer's sudden death had also had its severe effect upon Sir Peter.

As he sat in the back of the chariot watching Kitty offer her last ministrations to the dying man, he had read within Jack's eyes an undisguisable knowledge.

Later he had recognised his son in his own startled face in the mirror. Should Anne once catch a sight of Jack, half at least of the secret would leap forth.

But what disturbed Sir Peter the most was the discovery that his unexpected and passionate uprising of desire after Jack grew and grew—refusing to be cut down. He craved after this son with a longing which shattered every other interest in life. Anne—Catherine—even Malcolm—what did they signify? Ruthlessly he swept them aside. He wanted Jack with a force that staggered him.

Day after day, evening after evening, Sir Peter rode or walked the district like some love-sick wanderer seeking for a glimpse of the beloved.

If only he might listen secretly to this son of his who was setting the country-side aflame. All could claim Jack as their own—save himself.

Every attempt failed, until on the Sunday he was startled by seeing Jack's face in profile against the stained glass of a south window.

The General Confession bowed all heads.

"We have offended against Thy holy laws. . . . We have done those things which we ought not to have done. . . . There is no health in us . . ."

Then Sir Peter became aware of a strong fragrance of lavender water, which advised him that Anne had edged herself nearer to him.

"Peter, take me out!" she whispered.

It was an undertaking to get her ladyship out of the church, and Parson Lutterby waited politely to pronounce the Absolution until she had gone.

The Manor House chariot was called, and the coachman lost his expected glass.

"Are you making up yet another lie, Sir Peter?" asked his wife, as, after a silent drive, they reached the *salon*.

"No!" he replied.

"Then—give him anything he wants—on condition that he leaves the neighbourhood for ever! At least you owe that to Malcolm and to Catherine and me!"

"Yes—I owe a great deal to Malcolm, and to Catherine and to you, Anne!" he returned unexpectedly. But before she could reply, he had left her.

XXIX

NANCY WARNS

All Bracken Fell and Bishop's End were awake early on the great Monday.

Jack had ridden off on the Sunday night to join David and Mary Ross, for he and David were to be on duty in St. Peter's Field, to help to place the contingents as they arrived, to see that order was kept, and to make sure that no cause was given by any to create riot or offer excuse for police action.

But Kitty had decided in favour of walking all the way with her father and the men, women and children, and clothed in her white cloak and a little straw bonnet, bordered with blue, she entered Nancy's bedroom to wish her good-bye.

"Good-bye, dear granny!" she said, as she stooped to kiss her. "Mrs. Dennis will attend you well while I am away, and you will see me back to-morrow. You remember that I sleep the night with Mistress Mary, unless the folks want me to walk back with them."

Nancy looked sweet and wistful in her daintily frilled nightcap, and she stretched out her hand.

"Poor mad Nancy waits and waits for the Lady of Bracken Fell—and she never comes! Whisht!"

How Kitty dreaded Nancy's "Whisht." She longed to escape, but she could not rudely tear her hand away.

"Kitty! Don't go! The devil has got there first! Whisht, lass!"

"There is nothing, granny dear!" said the girl patiently. Yet her nerves tingled in response to the old woman's agitation.

"Nowt? Nowt?" cried Nancy. "Get to yon window—sharp!" and Kitty felt her hand flung away.

Through a break in the orchard a stretch of road could be seen. Suddenly there came a clattering of hoofs, and Kitty watched a band of yeomanry trot smartly across the gap.

"You have sharp ears, granny!" she said merrily. "Some troops out for exercise. It is a lovely morning!"

"Aye—a lovely morning—but what of the night, lass?"

Kitty came across and kissed her again.

"Nancy is a devil's woman, so there is no prayer she can make for thee and Jack!" she said mournfully. "Bide! Bide! Let the devil keep Manchester to himself!"

"Why, granny, 'tis the beginning of the golden dawn in Manchester to-day. Music and banners and fair clothing and laughter, and thousands upon thousands to shout for liberty!"

"Aye, aye!" murmured the old woman, as she sank back on her pillow. "Poor mad Nancy!"

Kitty could not linger, for the people were waiting; but she walked slower than usual to Mr. Dolling's tree. Granny might be mad in her fears, but Major Rawby had been amongst the yeomanry.

But whether it was the scent of the exquisite morning or the sense of possible danger which stimulated her, Kitty could not have told. But the instant she came in sight of the assembling people, she responded to their greetings with joyous confidence.

Banners, Sunday clothes, gay bonnets and shawls—each had done his or her best to honour the wonderful day, and Mr. Dolling, unable to go himself, had supplied more than one good pair of shoes for ill-shod feet.

And even as Kitty talked with her father there came the sound of enlivening music. Bishop's Enders were arriving, heralded by a brass band from a chapel, playing hymn tunes.

About five hundred men and women from each township had decided to march, and a few keen boys and girls had prevailed upon their parents to let them take a share in the great adventure.

The band put the finishing touch to the sense of festivity, and as Vipond passed up and down, giving instructions, jokes and chaff shot back and forth gaily.

" Order " was the word which fell most constantly from the leader's lips, for it was a severe responsibility to take so large and inexperienced a crowd to the great town.

Therefore the processionists were divided into groups of fifties, under a leader, wearing laurel in his hat, and after all had fallen in, Vipond stood against the tree to shout final directions.

" Listen, men and women! March steady and regular, keep to your ranks, and you'll find it easier going if you keep step. Give a good look at the fellow with the laurel in his hat, so that you may know him again. Stick to him, for Manchester is a bigger spot than Bracken Fell, and we don't want some of you wandering off to Leeds or Preston. When the meeting is over, fall in and come right back. We don't want any stopping in Manchester or there may be trouble. You've all got your food with you, and if you want drinks—Well—you can get them on your way home! And remember that there are particular orders that there shall be no sticks. Oh—you old lads can have them—but you youngsters—chuck them away. There will be plenty of rascals in Manchester crazed for you to get a fight going, as Nancy's Jack has told us, and we don't want Bracken Fell disgracing us all."

" And what if they touch Mr. Hunt ? " demanded a collier.

" Even if they touch Mr. Hunt you must do nothing against the police officers. Why, lads—Mr. Hunt has already offered to give himself up if they have a warrant out. But the magistrates have said they have no warrant—and that the meeting is not illegal. So no hooting and booing—such-like only makes bad blood. Keep your breath for cheering Hunt and shouting for what you carry on your banners! Now——" and he turned to the waiting crowd, " send us off with a cheer, and be ready with another when we come home! "

The villagers' cheer turned to a general shout of gladness as Mr. Dolling, beaming with goodwill, was carried in a chair

to the old tree. Leaning on Kitty, he managed to raise a hand, and, as he did so, many a head was bowed.

"Almighty God!" he cried, "look down on these Thy children. Let no evil befall their souls this day. Keep them, whatever may befall, from all sin. The Lord bless you—the Lord keep you!" His voice broke, and Kitty, putting an arm about him, helped him back to the chair.

"Three cheers for Master Dolling!" yelled an enthusiast.

The processionists and villagers took up the cry, and afterwards, Kitty stood up and thanked them on the old man's behalf.

Vipond had just given the signal for the band to strike up "God save the King," when over the brow of the common Malcolm came riding towards them, with Jim in attendance.

He waved his hat and gave a shout of greeting, but he was utterly unprepared for the unrestrained burst of acclamation which broke from the delighted crowd.

"Yes, I am coming, if you will allow me to ride!" he said, laughing, as he shook hands with several.

Mr. Malcolm, the squire's son, was to go with them. The last doubt vanished from every soul.

"Quick march!" shouted Vipond. The band played vociferously, if not tunefully, feet shuffled, shoulders straightened, leaders frowned with importance. The gay procession had started. The great day had dawned.

XXX

THE BEACON

Sir Peter waked up from a restless dream under an impression of galloping horses. He sat up with a start and listened.

But there was no sound of horses, but only a distant band playing "Rule, Britannia."

Then he remembered and lay back impatiently, in order to hide all thought in sleep.

But sleep had taken to mocking him. He looked at his watch. It was very early. Restlessly he rose and stood at the open lattice.

He could faintly distinguish the music. Then all became quiet. He looked down into the sleep-laden garden. Mists

were winding themselves about the lawns and shrubberies, all uncertain in their courses. But there was the music again. It sounded more clearly. The procession was rounding the common towards the right.

"Come lasses and lads, get leave of your dads,
And away to the Maypole hie. . . ."

Sir Peter slammed the window. Then, as though compelled by some outside power, he opened it again.

"And trip it! Trip it! Trip it up and down!"

And now he could distinguish irregular singing, stray shouts, breaks of laughter, and the steady tramping of feet.

Why could not life leave Sir Peter alone?

This was August the 16th. Then why were these people going a-maying? A maypole rose before his eyes—with dancing in the park. He pressed his hands over his eyes as recollection flooded, and the refrain fell fainter and fainter:

"Trip it! Trip it! Trip it up and down!"

The garden seemed to give a rustling sigh and sink to rest again. But still in Peter's ears horses galloped, and in his eyes loomed the night on the road to Gretna Green. What a month of bliss had been theirs. What a gladness to show Madge some of the joys of a world so new to her. How her eyes had sparkled. How she had kissed him with an all-yielding love. Was she not his wife?

Without troubling his man, Sir Peter dressed feverishly. An anxiety he could not control pressed upon him. What had that nightmare of galloping horses meant? Was it only the road to Gretna Green that was torturing his brain, or was it Major Rawby's wild talk?

The major had bluntly declared for keeping the lower orders in their places. But Sir Peter's sensitive temperament was re-asserting itself against the numbing influences of the crushing years. An amazing thought arrested him.

What exactly constituted the "place" of these lower orders? Did the upper orders make such a success of life as to give them all wisdom in choosing for the rest?

Was it this idea that had driven Malcolm to Manchester? Both his sons were struggling on the side of the lower orders to-day.

He hurried out when dressed, and the servants took no notice, save to look at one another meaningly, for their master had taken to going out and coming in at strange hours.

Sir Peter crossed the park and ascended the hill, until, reaching the beacon, he gazed round him with a new sensitiveness in his eyes.

The sun was rising, throwing a wonderful mystic sheen over the landscape. Far away was the glimmer of the sea, and the smoke from Manchester, and with keen eyes he observed, on more than one road, people marching with banners. What was the underlying meaning of this strange obstinate moving of the people?

Those thin marching lines, and so many he could not see, meant rebellion. And if so—had not man a right to rebel? If a life of culture, leisure, security, was the final goal of man, either it was a false goal—a curse to those who secured it—or it was a true goal, and none had a right to batter down those who would yet achieve it. What a fierce daily accusation that rising sun threw at all ugliness, vileness and squalor.

Yet the indecision which ever cursed him still held sway, and he turned back towards the house.

It was one of the mercies of Sir Peter's daily life that Anne never appeared until noon; but at breakfast Catherine was all excitement.

"They have really gone, father!" she cried. "About a thousand, and I hear that they went as gaily as to the crowning of a May queen. But it is monstrous that Malcolm should have supported them."

"Malcolm has started?"

"Yes, but not decently, alone with his servant. He has accepted the cheers of the rabble, and has been seen actually walking his horse alongside of them!"

"Malcolm is scarcely fit for such exertion," said Sir Peter, frowning. "Has George gone?"

"George does not enjoy the kind of thing the yeomanry are out for!" and her pretty lips pouted.

"What can you mean, Catherine?"

"Why pretend, father! Besides—what would you? One hundred thousand people gathered in rank rebellion! Major Rawby has, he says, taken good care that the sabres of his troops are well sharpened. It may take more than Uncle

David and Aunt Mary and Malcolm and that wild fellow they call Nancy's Jack, to keep the rebels' skins whole!"

"Catherine! How can you?" His daughter's hard, selfish eyes hurt him intolerably.

"Father! I trust that you are not going over to the enemy?" she said, with a laugh.

"The difficulty is, Catherine, that opinions in the world are strangely divided as to who is the enemy."

XXXI

ST. PETER'S FIELD

It could not be denied that David and Mary were exceedingly anxious as to the outcome of the Reform meeting.

They were aware that spies and "police runners" were on the alert to foment and seize upon any action or talk which could be construed into sedition, and moreover, that the Government was on its mettle to find cause for the Seditious Meetings Act, for the Combination Laws, for the general persecution of Free Speech and Free Press, and for the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act.

Everything in the Manchester Reformers' opinion hinged upon whether they could control the people in the event of insult, arrest or threat of violence, but in the choice of Henry Hunt as chairman, they trusted that his popularity and skill in dealing with crowds would win the day for argument.

The meeting was to begin at noon, but by ten o'clock people had begun to gather, and contingents with bands and banners and gaily dressed women and girls and fustian clothed men began to arrive.

Jack and David, with many other capable organisers, were here, there and everywhere, dealing with the arrivals, setting them in their places, and gathering together a selection of the banners to grace the hustings.

It soon became clear that it would be necessary to secure an open space between the massing people and the hustings, and Jack gave strict orders to a stout body of men to make sure this was done.

The magistrates began to gather in a certain Mr. Buxton's house on one side of the area, and Jack's efforts were immediately construed into being a subtle plan for violent protection

of the speakers in the event of arrest. But the young man's gaiety, his chaff with the special constables, and the jovial responses shot out to him from the crowd contradicted all alarm of violence.

"They say, Mistress Mary," said Jack merrily, as he found an instant in which to speak to her, "that our orderly arrival proves that we have drilled our contingents to sack Manchester! Men out for such work would scarcely bring their wives and sisters and children into the forefront!" and he pointed to groups of keen women, some with infants in their arms or children clinging to their skirts.

"Ah—here they come!" cried Mary, as she noticed the Bracken Fell banner, and behind it the hot, dusty company, tired, but gay and inordinately proud of their achievement.

"Why, Malcolm!" cried Mary delightedly. "How splendid of you to come."

"Not splendid, Aunt Mary!" and he took her hand and looked into her eyes. "I had to come. I have begun to live!"

"It is a great sight!" and Mary sighed. For, indeed, the pathetic and deplorable poverty of the vast majority of the people tortured her heart.

"Aunt Mary," he said, as though voicing her thought, "what devil possesses us that we need a meeting like this to bring about the most obvious justice?"

"I simply do not know, Malcolm," she answered.

"And we build our church spires—to point to heaven!"

"You must not stay in the crowd," said Mary. "You must keep on the outskirts—you and your man." And she patted his horse like a true horse lover.

"I know!" he smiled wistfully. "I feel, Aunt Mary, a curious sense to-day as though I were on the outskirts of life—as if—I do not belong here—I cannot explain——"

But they were interrupted by Jack, who came rushing up.

"Kitty! That's right!" and he gave her a swift understanding smile. "Keep charge of the banner. We have enough for the hustings now. Ah—Mr. Ross—they have sent special constables to keep open the way between the hustings and Mr. Buxton's house. I have told them they are quite welcome to do so, and I have ordered the people to make way!" He was off again, pushing his broad shoulders through the crowd, which was increasing every minute as

fresh contingents arrived, blaring their music, and being received by the massed cheering of those already in their places.

"A cat won't be able to wedge its way through soon!" said Kitty to her father, with a satisfied laugh.

"Aye, Miss Kitty, you've fetched us straight to where the old world is wagging!" chuckled a weaver.

But Jack could be seen on the hustings, stilling the people by his eager, commanding manner.

"Men and women, Order! Order! That is our last word to you. We are out to show the world that we value ourselves, and that every man has a right to make the laws which govern him. We stand for justice—and good will to our fellows. Violence only leads to the shame of those who use it. Good luck! Keep your tempers and your tongues, and keep your hands in your pockets!"

There was a general laugh, and Jack, with a final wave of the hand, leaped down from the hustings into the crowd.

"He is coming—he is here!" so the word passed.

"Hunt! Hunt for Liberty! Three cheers for Hunt!"

How the chaise got through was a marvel, but the people pressed back, and Hunt waved his hat in acknowledgment of the ovation with obvious delight, while in front of him was borne a board bearing the words, "Order! Order!"

"There must be nearly a hundred thousand people here, Jim!" said Malcolm, as he edged his horse up a scrap of rising ground.

Malcolm was keenly interested in the personality of Henry Hunt, and he watched intently as the tall, dapper figure, elegant in broadcloth, fine cambric and top boots, came forward to speak, after having been elected by acclamation into the chair.

He lifted his hand, and there was a deep silence, but Malcolm could not hear, and, indeed, his attention was diverted to a movement on the outskirts of the crowd, and turning, he noticed with annoyance that a troop of yeomanry was advancing down a side street.

"Why do the cavalry show themselves?" he exclaimed to Jim.

But, scarcely believing his eyes, he saw to his horror that they were advancing at a smart place directly into the wedged

crowd, making, apparently, for Mr. Buxton's house. Instant confusion must be the result, but marvellously the eager crowd made way, though some on the outskirts of the field began to rush away.

"Give them a cheer!" shouted Hunt. "They are in confusion already!"

The crowd responded; the cavalry answered the cheering with a flourish of sabres, and dashed recklessly towards the hustings. The crowd backed to avoid the horses' hoofs. One or two went down. Panic must result.

Jack, well to the front, implored the people to make way.

The yeomanry officer, flourishing his sword in Hunt's face, demanded his surrender. Hunt boldly refused to surrender to any save the civil power, as did Mr. Johnson. But Nadin, the deputy chief constable, was at hand, and though he produced no warrant, they instantly surrendered.

"Friends!" shouted Hunt. "Order! Order!" and in a few passionate words he sought to calm the excitement.

Seeing their leaders arrested before their eyes, now was surely the moment for the exasperated crowd to fulfil the prophecies of the enemy, and attack and sack Manchester. But the intention not being in their minds, they could only look hither and thither—bewildered and terrified, while Jack, Kitty, Mary, David, Vipond and many another frantically tried to reassure, foreseeing a catastrophe.

Hunt, Johnson, and others were hurried to Mr. Buxton's house through a lane of special constables, and Hunt was kicked and batoned mercilessly on his way. Jack, seeking to get through between his leader and his enemies, suddenly became aware of the wild and savage face of Major Rawby. With uplifted sword he was urging his excited horse recklessly through the people. He must get in his promised blow at Hunt at any cost.

"No!" shouted Jack. He swung himself up behind the officer, wrenched his sword from him, dropped back amongst the crowd and let the sword lie broken under the feet of the people.

But Hunt arrested, the yeomanry, terrified at the rising wrath of the crowd, began hacking to right and left of them as though demented.

"Have at their banners," yelled Rawby. The hint was

enough. A mad stampede ensued as the cavalry, now out of all control, made for the banners, first on the hustings and then amongst the crowd.

"Escape—get down the side streets!" thundered Vipond to his distraught followers, and, indeed, the crowd was flying in every direction. Organised resistance was not entertained, though a few threw wildly any missive on which they could lay hands.

"Keep back, sir! In God's name, keep back!" cried Jim to his master. "You can do no good, sir!"

"My God! The people!" So Malcolm shouted, as though he would pierce the heavens.

In the wild welter of confusion, Mary lost David, and, indeed, there was no possibility of keeping together. Flashing swords, cries, groans, trampling horses, clouds of dust, triumphed over any hope of order.

Vipond had succeeded in getting some of his contingent into safety, but to Malcolm's further despair there advanced from behind another troop of hussars, which hemmed in the maddened crowd.

Flight was the one predominating instinct, but Kitty, through the confusion, became possessed of one idea. She would stick to the Bracken Fell banner, if she died for it.

Jack, seeing he could no longer be of use in staving off the public catastrophe, now rushed back, hoping that at least he might save Kitty.

But Major Rawby had caught sight of the Bracken Fell banner. With clenched teeth he determined that it should never leave the field. At a hand gallop, careless of the fallen, and armed with another sabre, the rider made for the banner and the girl in white.

But Jack was before him.

"Jim!" shouted Malcolm.

Kitty gazed transfixed as the cavalry charger loomed larger and larger. But she could not unclasp her hands. Nothing seemed to matter any more except the banner of the people. She shut her eyes.

"You!" yelled Rawby, raising his sabre, as he saw Jack between him and his object.

But again he was too late.

His sabre, indeed, crashed. But it was a horse and rider that rolled in the dust.

With a wild curse, Rawby put spurs to his charger and galloped away.

The field was almost empty now, save for the dead, the wounded, and those who stayed to save.

It had all taken about ten minutes.

XXXII

ON THE ROAD TO MANCHESTER

Sir Peter was galloping along the road to Manchester. He was a fool to be doing it, so he kept telling himself, and yet the foam was white on his horse's neck where the rein frothed the sweat, and the beast, as he panted along, wondered at the punishment he was receiving from a master, usually so considerate.

He was but a mile or so from the outskirts of the town when he pulled up to mock at his own sensitiveness. The air was surely thick with strange noise. And then, as he turned a corner, he understood, as he nearly rode into a crowd of men, women and children, running helter-skelter, breathless, screaming, moaning, appealing, bleeding.

"A massacre! A massacre!" they shouted, terrified and dazed.

Sir Peter drew to one side. He watched the crowd as it passed. But it would not pass. It went on and on.

"Curse you, squire!" shouted a voice.

He found himself staring at a group of Bishop's End miners. The face of the curser was streaming with blood. A woman shook her fist. A man from behind raised in his arms an ashen-faced child.

Sir Peter plunged spurs into his horse. He galloped on, He must get to Manchester.

But everywhere, as he at last gained the streets, he saw consternation and confusion. Cavalry were charging recklessly, in complete disorder. A man went down before a sabre thrust even as he swerved to pass.

He reached St. Peter's Field, and drew rein to survey the battleground.

Hats, bonnets, shawls, shoes, dead, dying, wounded. Artillery were drawing guns across, infantry were firing a few defiant volleys in honour of the victory. Yeomanry were

breathing their horses, unloosening girths, wiping their sabres. A few townsfolk were drawing away the piled bodies which were smothering those below.

He drew his hand across his eyes, utterly unprepared for so ghastly a sight.

"Peter!" said a soft woman's voice, and he felt his rein quiver.

"Mary!" He looked down and read the anguish in her eyes. Was it only on account of the public catastrophe that she looked like that? He could not tell. He dared not ask. He dismounted.

A dishevelled woman was wailing over the dead body of a man. A young lad was rocking himself in agony. A girl was gazing, as though distraught, at her hands into which blood was trickling from her gashed face.

"Come," said Mary.

"Tell me!" and he gripped her arm. "Have they—killed Jack?"

His question was utterly unexpected, but Mary swiftly read the agony of years in her brother's eyes.

"No—it is Malcolm—over there!" she answered, and her brother became aware of a group but a few yards away. There was Jim with the horse, David, Kitty and others.

Peter clung to his sister for support, and together they advanced to see That which lay as the centre point of all that hideous field.

Malcolm, his son, was dead, lying in the blood that soaked his neck and shoulder, and beside him there kneeled Jack, in an utter devotion which no bystander dared to interrupt.

But presently Kitty let her banner fall with a thud to the ground and kneeled by her lover. Jack accepted her hand, then staggered, all dazed, to his feet.

He looked at his other hand, red with blood.

"Kitty, my brother's blood, poured out for me!" So Sir Peter heard, and watched speechless, as the girl impulsively flung off her white cloak and laid it tenderly over the dead man.

"But—how——" the words broke from Sir Peter, and Jack, keeping fast hold of Kitty, fixed his sorrow-filled eyes on his father.

"He threw himself between me and death, sir. We were brothers!" Then, with a choking sob, Jack turned away, dragging Kitty with him.

"There was nothing we could do, Peter," said David, coming forward. "The thrust was too deep."

"He can't lie here!" said Sir Peter, scarcely knowing what he said.

"Some of us will find a stretcher, sir," said Jim, and throwing his reins to Vipond, he dashed away.

But even as they waited there was a sound of commotion, cheering, and counter-cheering and groaning.

The prisoners were being marched off to the New Bailey. "Let them walk!" had been the rude retort, when it had been suggested that they should ride.

With a couple of broken banner poles held derisively in front, Henry Hunt and his fellows walked along. There was triumph on the leader's face, wounded as he was, for he was already prepared to fight every inch of the ground through the courts. But as he caught sight of the "battleground" a spasm of mortal pain quivered his expressive face, and David and Mary, after a word to Peter, hurried away to offer a last greeting to the captured men.

Hunt looked up as they approached, and gave them his big, characteristic smile.

"Reform has triumphed!" cried Jack, so that all might hear. "Baptised in the blood of the people!"

Hunt's eyes filled.

"Tell the sufferers—tell all the people that Hunt fights on still."

"And the dead, sir——" said Jack, "will know!"

But Sir Peter kneeled and took the cloak from the face of his son. Anne's son had died for Madge's son, and he was the father of them both.

The others were returning as Jim arrived with the stretcher, and reverently the dead man was lifted, while a little crowd of stranded Bracken Fell folks stood with uncovered heads.

"Are we to take him to an inn, your honour?" asked Jim.

A young weaver came forward, bare-headed.

"Sir—let us Bracken Fell lads bear him home. He died for the people, your honour!"

So the procession started, and the squire, refusing to mount, also walked.

XXXIII

"SHE DOES NOT KNOW"

It was by a travelling post chaise, and then by a rider, that news arrived in Bracken Fell of the disaster.

At first it could not be believed, then a horrified doubt grew, and horsemen were sent off along the road to learn what they might.

Lady Mason had heard no news. She sat querulously making small talk to Catherine as they waited for the chariot to take them a round of ceremonial calls.

In the loveless atmosphere of the Manor House there remained nothing beautiful in the relationship between mother and daughter. Even though Catherine's worldly success was part of Anne's ambition, they wrangled with daily monotony.

Malcolm was different. He wandered through his world with a certain aloofness. Always affectionate, polite, unselfish, and at times wistfully anxious to re-create his home, his mother's heart centred about him with a passion, the strength of which she was not herself aware.

But to-day Anne was annoyed that Malcolm had insisted upon going to Manchester, and incensed that her husband had not paid her the compliment of escorting her on social duty of importance.

But an excitement on the face of the usually placid butler who came in to announce the chariot made Lady Mason ask if anything had gone wrong.

"Well, my lady," he replied nervously, "they do say that there has been a dreadful battle in Manchester, and thousands killed and wounded, and the town burnt to the ground by the rebels, and them threatening to string up every magistrate."

"Oh, Charles!" exclaimed Catherine, "what a village tale!" Yet her eyes danced with mingled interest and indignation.

"That is what some say, Miss Catherine, but there's others who say that the yeomanry charged the people and that there's neither man, woman nor child left alive."

"Two perfectly monstrous stories," said Catherine snubbingly.

"Certainly, Miss Catherine," agreed the man modestly. "The chariot is here, my lady!"

"Of course, something has happened, mamma!" said the girl, as the man left the room. "I fancy George was afraid of this. That is why he did not go. Whatever George is, he is not a warrior!" and she laughed cynically.

"He is a peer!" said her mother.

"So I have heard before, mamma!" said Catherine impatiently.

"Well," sighed her mother, "there is no need for us to put out our engagements!" and she rose languidly.

But it was clear as they passed along that some tale was being believed. Terror-stricken women stood debating in their doorways, and eager groups darted out of the way of the horses, and many were hurrying off along the Manchester road.

It was relief to see Parson Lutterby, and Lady Mason ordered the chariot to draw up, close by Mr. Dolling's shop.

"Can you explain all this excitement, Mr. Lutterby?" she asked.

"I fear, my lady, that something serious has happened. God grant it may be a lesson to these lower orders not to be hasty in rebellion against their betters. As I have preached to them, times without number, all will come right if they will but have patience. Patience is a precious grace of God, my lady."

"Patience!" called Dolling, in his thin quavering voice. "The patience of the people is the wonder of the ages! Thus saith the Lord, Parson Lutterby, 'Woe be to the shepherds of Israel who do feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock? Ye eat the fat and clothe you with the wool, and with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them! My sheep are scattered—I, the Lord, cry, Woe to the idle shepherds!'"

"The man is mad!" exclaimed Lady Mason.

"Quite, my lady!" said the parson, with a genial smile and a gracious bow.

But the road was now blocked by the arrival of a stage waggon.

Instantly it was surrounded by the villagers, and the wailings broke forth as several wounded figures were helped out.

"Oh, mamma—it is real!" exclaimed Catherine, shocked at what she saw. "Perhaps Malcolm was right after all!"

"Of course, I am sorry for the poor things!" she said, frowning. "If you, Mr. Lutterby, would be good

enough——" but turning, she saw that the shepherd had fled.

But Lady Mason, so long as she was treated with respect, was always glad of opportunity to play the Lady Bountiful, and rising, so that all might see her, she said in her most gracious manner :

" My good people, any of you who are in need, pray send to the Manor House, and my housekeeper will look to you."

She was a little startled at the silence with which her overture was received.

" She does not know ! " said a young labourer, who had clambered out of the waggon holding an arm to his side.

" What do I not know ? " demanded the lady.

" Oh—nothing—beg pardon, my lady ! " said the man, all abashed, and inwardly cursing his tongue.

" Let us drive on, mamma ! " said Catherine. " I cannot bear the way they stare at us ! "

So they galloped forward, trying not to notice forlorn groups, footsore and heart-broken, who made way for them with a chivalrous sympathy.

" Her ladyship must have heard," so they said awe-strickenly.

But suddenly one of the postillions turned in his saddle.

" It is Sir Peter, my lady ! " and his face showed some strange emotion.

" Mamma—let us stop ! In God's name, what has happened ? " broke forth Catherine.

But Sir Peter was already at the chariot door.

" Anne—dear Anne—turn—drive home—I beg of you ! "

" Father ! Not—oh, not Malcolm ? " cried Catherine piteously, as her mother stared, speechless.

" Dear Anne—I pray you——"

" Is Malcolm wounded, Peter ? "

" Yes——"

" Dead ? "

He bowed over her hand and kissed it, but snatching it away she tore open the door, and half fell into the road.

There was nothing for it but to let his wife have her way, and Jack and Kitty, seeing them coming, moved back, after telling the bearers to set down their load.

Anne kneeled and tore off the covering cloak.

"Yes—it is Malcolm!" she whispered. Then she swayed and Sir Peter caught her in his arms.

But Catherine made no sound, and no lament. Her face was deathly white. She took the edge of the cloak and covered the face.

"Catherine," said a voice at her side. "Come with me, dear."

"Oh—Aunt Mary!" The girl gave a gulping sob, then allowed her aunt to draw her into a chaise in which she had followed the sad procession.

XXXIV

JOHN WOLFSON'S SON

It was Jack who helped to carry Malcolm into the Manor House, and as he and Vipond and the others were turning to go, Sir Peter, ashen pale, stately, composed, pointed towards his study and asked him to stay.

Jack whispered a message for Kitty to her father, and then quietly entered the empty room.

Alone at last, his intense suppression of thought broke down completely. A wave of fury surged over him against the hideous wrong done to the people, a wave of sheer human grief followed, as he thought of his newly-found brother—and then an awed stillness subdued him. He was alive because another was dead.

Glancing about him, he noticed a portrait of Malcolm, full length, in velvet and lace as he remembered him—a boy of eleven, pleading for his father's honour. In the mirror Jack saw himself, tall, rugged, strong, soiled with conflict, but alive. He went to the window and looked across the soft undulating sward, away to the park, and upwards through a break in the woodlands to the beacon. And all this might be his, at a word.

"And now, Jack, what are you going to do about it all?" Jack turned sharply, and looked his father in the face, then flung himself down in the seat to which Sir Peter pointed. "I need not ask whether you know?" he added.

"I know everything, sir."

"That you are my son—my elder son?" Sir Peter struggled hard to keep up his dignified repose.

"I know that my mother was your wife, sir."

"And therefore——"

"Have no fear, sir. I remain—what I am. Jack Wolfson, for ever!"

"No, no, Jack!"

The words broke as a cry from a torture chamber, and Jack was painfully staggered. Surely he could be nothing to this man who had murdered his youth and broken his mother's heart. But to waver was impossible. He and Kitty had faced out their lives together, and his mind was made up.

"I can do no other, sir," he said. "Read this letter, and even you will understand that I refuse to bear the name of any save the man who sheltered my mother in her extremity."

Sir Peter took the letter, and as he read the very pains of hell played on his face.

"You are lying in your cradle, and your mother is singing you a lullaby, even as I write. She is a beautiful woman, Jack. The fairest a man could ever woo. But she has been broken by life and by man. . . . At Gretna Green I found that the squire had been falsely true. My Madge was his wife, and never will John Wolfson be her husband, save only in name, God helping him. . . . I have asked her, 'Suppose he and I stood together, to whom would you go,' for my heart craved to know the truth. 'Oh, you know—you know, John!' was her answer. So she is mine—mine—and none shall touch her, and I have promised her that you shall be as my son, Jack o' the People and no aristocrat! . . . God bless you, my son, as though you were my own, as indeed, before God's throne I think you are, and therefore I subscribe myself

"Your affectionate father,

"JOHN WOLFSON."

Sir Peter laid down the letter, and looked into his son's eyes, and Jack for a third time realised that it is not the sinned against, but the sinner for whom mercy must be craved. But like some skilled surgeon this young man knew that he must go on relentlessly to the end of his task, for truth, clear and sharp as an edged sword, could alone win this day of reckoning.

"Sir," he inquired gravely, "were you a party to the plot for pressing my father?"

"By hell, you shall know all!" cried Sir Peter. "I was no

party to the plot, but when your mother came to me with you in her arms to plead with me to buy him out—then—I refused."

A spasm of anguish crossed Jack's face, and he worked with his fingers. Sir Peter noticed the trick, and found that he was doing the same.

"You have not told me all, sir," said Jack. "After you refused, and my mother threw herself into the river with me in her arms—what then?"

Sir Peter pressed his hand against his forehead and stared.

"You might have saved her?"

"Jack!" and the sweat broke along the baronet's brow, "for twenty-five years I have asked myself that question!"

Sir Peter buried his face in his hands, and Jack rose to pace the room and fight the devil clamouring within his soul. Why should he not take his stormy revenge? Had ever a man so just a one to take?

"Jack! Be my son! Let me—let me try to make it up to you——" The words died on his lips at the look in the young man's eyes.

"Make it up! O Christ!" He strode to the window, then as rapidly returned, and his father saw once again the passion of Madge's deep brown eyes. "Father! This is the first time and the last time I ever expect to use that word. You have sinned against my mother, against the man who succoured her, against the woman you now hold as your wife. You have sinned against your dead son, against your living daughter. You have sinned against the people—and most of all you have sinned against yourself—against all you might have been——"

"You think I don't know all that?" Sir Peter interrupted stormily. "But—you are my son—no deeds of mine—no words of yours can break the truth. You are my heir—heir to the title, heir to the entailed lands——"

Jack gave a queer laugh, and, flinging himself down, spoke more quietly.

"Let us be done with heroics, Sir Peter. The life of a squire would be intolerable to me. For twenty-six years I have been one of the people. I have laughed with them, cried with them, scoffed at them, sung to them, cursed at them, cursed with them, and—prayed for them. My eyes have seen too large a vision to live stifled in a manor house! I am built

for struggle, not for ease—look at my hands ! " and he flung them out.

" What are those marks ? " faltered Sir Peter, even as he knew.

" Those marks ? " Jack traced the scars on his wrist with a finger. " As St. Paul bore about in his body the marks of Christ, so I, Jack o' the People, bear the marks of the people. There are plenty more on my back, and——" he stuck out a heavy riding boot meaningly, " you will remember, sir, that hour when you suffered a child to go down into hell. I am wiser to the reason now. You were whipped to the deed by your own lie at the altar, when you took the Lady Anne de Mandeville as your wife. Bigamy. 'Tis an ugly word with an ugly fate at its back. Hanging—or wearing the fetters I have worn."

Sir Peter again bowed before his son, for what word could he utter ?

" And all that John Wolfson understood," Jack went on in a low emotional tone. " John Wolfson, in the hour that he learnt the truth, refused to break up your home—refused to bring sorrow to another woman's heart. To-day, I but yield up the fruit of John Wolfson's sowing. We will have in the lawyers. We will break the entail—aye——" as Sir Peter lifted a hand in urgent remonstrance. " Can you think that I should ever have taken the property from Malcolm ? Malcolm, thinking me his bastard brother, had already offered to share with me all he could ! But now——" Jack paused in perplexity. " If I am your only legitimate son, sir, and I refuse—who in law is the next of kin ? "

" My sister—if you—Jack—once again—can't you ? "

But the last doubt swept from the young man's face, and a radiant smile illuminated it.

" Mistress Mary ! Perhaps God is working after all ! " he cried. " But, sir—hear my one request ! " and his manner changed to an eager confidence. " Give back what you can of the common to the people. Let the land be held in trust for the people of Bracken Fell and Bishop's End for ever. I want——" and his voice dropped tenderly, " my dear old granny to go to her long rest in peace."

He had to wait patiently for his answer. Could God be in this ? Madge's son was demanding back his wedding gift to Anne. The poisonous curse had entered in by the gate of

folly, extravagance and pride. It had consummated in the robbery of the people.

" Jack ! Every demand you make is yours—but—be my son ! "

Jack took up the letter, which had fallen to the ground. He folded it slowly, and hid it in his breast.

" You and I, sir, will, I trust, be friends, man to man, so long as we both shall live. But I am the son of the man who died for the people. Jack Wolfson I was in my chains, Jack Wolfson I will be in my freedom, and—have I not promised my Kitty that she shall be Jack Wolfson's wife ? "

He had risen, and was about to go, when the door opened, and Anne entered.

She started back. Here, then, was Jack—triumphant. There stood the embodiment of all her long years of self-torture. The infant her conscience told her she had all but murdered, the lad she had hoped might hang, the gnawing reason for her own ill-health, and now—the man for whom her idolised son had thrown away his life. What did he demand ? And she nerved herself proudly.

But Jack, at sight of her, forgot everything except that here was a woman wronged, as his mother had been wronged, and whose very heart was wrung because he was alive. With a swift grace he sank upon one knee before her.

" Forgive me ! " he cried, bowing his face over her hand.

The surprise took from her all power of speech. She looked helplessly towards Sir Peter. But he had no help to give her.

" I—forgive you ? " she pronounced with difficulty. " You cannot know——"

" It is because I know everything, my lady," and he stood up before her, " that I asked you to forgive all the wrong you have suffered through Jack Wolfson."

He did not wait for her to answer him, but flung open the French window and strode off in the direction of the beacon.

Sir Peter put an arm about Anne, and together they stood watching until Jack disappeared from view. Then he helped her to a sofa.

" You need not fear to tell me everything," she said. " Nothing can matter to me any more."

" Anne, it is I who should kneel at your feet—I who—let me tell you all ! "

Sir Peter spared himself nothing. Plunging into the clean ocean of confession he fought to recover his last remnant of self-respect, and win back his lost soul.

"And so," said Anne at last, with a bewildering steadiness, "I have never been your wife?"

"No."

"It has been a—long, long lie!" She suddenly rose and stretched out her arms to the picture.

"Malcolm! Tell me—tell me what I ought to do!"

"Anne, let us go to him together!" pleaded Sir Peter.

A few minutes later they stood looking down at the quiet face of their dead son, and each was thinking the same yearning thought.

"If only he could speak and tell us what to do."

But at last Sir Peter drew her away.

"Anne—I want you to do a great deed—in case life has something left for us still."

She looked at him bewilderedly.

"I want you to travel with me to Gretna Green. I want you to become my wife. I can expect nothing for my own sake, but for Catherine's sake and——"

"To-night, do you mean?" she breathed.

XXXV

OVER THE BEACON

A WILD report had reached Rawby Castle that the major had killed the squire's son.

Lord Rawby, indignant and sceptical, instantly ordered his horse, intending to take the zig-zag route over the beacon which lay between him and the Manor House.

But as he was about to start the ascent, he reined up at sight of a yeomanry officer. His son would save him the journey.

Then he uttered a shout of horror and warning, as he saw the rider shake his reins and urge his maddened horse sheer down the steepest part of the beacon. For a moment or two it seemed that his son possessed the proverbial drunkard's life. Then came the inevitable stumble, the crash, and as Lord Rawby galloped to the spot he was dimly aware that some one was plunging headlong down the steep on foot.

He flung himself from his horse, letting him stand or go as

he would. Scarcely daring to go close to what was writhing in front of him, he saw that a man was already stooping and dragging the horse away.

"I followed him, my lord," said the man apologetically. "I saw that he was drunk."

Who was this young man who dared to speak so bluntly?

But Jack was raising the major's head from where it had been dashed against a sharp rock. He fumbled under the smart uniform, then glanced at Lord Rawby.

"He is dead, my lord!" he said quietly, as he uncovered.

"And you are——" faltered Lord Rawby.

"My name is Jack Wolfson, my lord."

"Then you were there—at Manchester. You will know if it is true what I have heard—the squire's son——" the rest died on his lips.

"I cannot tell what your lordship has heard," said Jack. "The squire's son is dead, otherwise I should not be here." And Jack, noticing that men from the farm were rushing along to help, offered Lord Rawby a sorrowful and respectful bow, and strode away.

But even when he reached the village Jack found it impossible to go at once to Kitty, for the sight of him brought the villagers flocking, and he could not push them from him. Bracken Fell had escaped comparatively lightly in the general wounding, yet all hearts were rent with pain and indignation, anger and disappointment.

Mr. Dolling had managed to resurrect some tremendous denunciations from the Prophets and the Psalms, which comfortingly voiced the general feeling, but the death of Mr. Malcolm, who had saved their own Jack from the sabre thrust, quelled the bitterest words.

"It was yonder major," cried a spinner. "Didn't I see him set his men at the banners? Didn't he nearly kill Mr. Hunt? It is him, lads, we should stamp into the dust like the vermin he is!"

"Don't!" thundered Jack. "God has said: 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay!' Leave Major Rawby in the hands of his Maker!"

"But it was him who murdered Mr. Malcolm, Jack!" insisted the man.

"Is that true?" shrieked Catherine. She had come up with her aunt and heard the last words.

"Come, Catherine," said Mary authoritatively.

"Mistress Mary," said Jack in a low tone. "It is as well that you should know that Major Rawby has just ridden himself to his death over the beacon. I was there."

Catherine heard, and, clinging to Mary, she was all madness to get away and take her aunt back to the Manor House. For, indeed, hard little Catherine had learnt more during the hour or two she had followed her Aunt Mary into the homes of the people than in her whole life before. She was all amazement at their disabilities, their miseries, their limitations, and, most remarkable of all, their generous sympathy with herself.

"Come—come, Aunt Mary!" she pleaded. "I want to get home—I want to go to Malcolm."

It was late that evening when Catherine and her aunt stood hand in hand in the death chamber. Only a candle threw its uncertain light on the calm triumphant face.

"He was the only bit of love in our home," the girl whispered brokenly.

But outside the room once more, Catherine trembled.

"Aunt Mary, Malcolm would have helped me to my better self, but I despised his ideals—despised the noblest he was—and now——" she shuddered. "He warned me—and he was right. I know now that I can never marry George. I thought—love did not matter!"

XXXVI

AT THE MARRIAGE HOUSE

At Gretna Green there were several competitors for the office of priest to the couples who galloped their horses over the border.

But Robert Elliot sat very contentedly over his pipe and glass one evening at the marriage house. He had taken over the business from his drinking old grandfather, Mr. Paisley, and this week had brought him good grist.

Fifty guineas was a grand fee for scrawling a few lines and listening to a few sentences, and the middle-aged couple who had arrived the day before had been lavish enough. Grand folk they were, too, and as Elliot's mind passed over the occurrence, the name of Peter Mason grew in familiarity. He

rose and unlocked a wall cupboard and took out a worn, much-bethumbed register.

But his occupation was interrupted by the sound of horses' hoofs.

"Mair grist to the mill!" he muttered, "and they haven't stopped at the toll house." For the toll-house keeper had an unfair chance of acting "priest."

His daughter went to the door, and an hostler rushed out from the stable yard, and in another moment Betsy was bringing in a tall weather-stained young man and a very beautiful woman.

"At last!" said Jack proudly.

"Yes!" said Kitty with a sudden shyness.

"You are Mr. Elliot?" he asked the landlord.

"Aye, sir, at your honour's service," he replied. "My daughter can set out the best supper in all Scotland, when your honour says the word."

"We will be married before we sup," said Jack simply. "And according to the wording of our English Book of Common Prayer, if you please."

"And that you shall, and pretty near any wording your honour chooses, so long as he wishes to make this bonny woman his wife before witnesses."

"'Tis the biggest wish I have ever had!" said Jack staunchly, "and for witnesses, the whole parish if you choose," and he smiled into Kitty's eyes.

"Wilt thou have this woman? Wilt thou have this man?"

So the time-honoured questions were asked and answered, and within a few moments the ring was on Kitty's finger. She was Jack Wolfson's wife.

"And you mustn't forget the certificate!" said Robert Elliot, as he brought out the paper and sat down to write.

Jack and Kitty looked over his shoulder curiously.

Here was a formal paper, headed with the Royal Arms, a chalice and a Bible.

"KINGDOM OF SCOTLAND, COUNTY OF DUMFRIES, PARISH OF GRETNA.

"This is to certify to all to whom these presents shall come, that John Wolfson from the parish of Bracken Fell in the

County of Northshire, and Catherine Vipond of the Parish of Bracken Fell in the County of Northshire, being now here present, and have declared themselves single persons, were this day married, after the manner of the Laws of the Church of England and agreeable to the Laws of Scotland, as witness our hands at the Marriage House, Gretna. This day of August 19th, 1819.

" JOHN WOLFSON.
" CATHERINE VIPOND."

Then followed the names of witnesses, Robert Elliot, his daughter, and a couple of servants.

Jack took it up when completed, and looked at it curiously.

" I once saw a certificate like this, dated 1792," he said. " The man's name was Peter Mason, and the woman's name was Madge Preston."

Robert Elliot frowned, then smacked the table. He had been right then. He had seen Peter Mason's name before.

" I'll soon see amongst my grandfather's papers ! " he said, as he rapidly turned them over.

" Aye—aye—sure ! " and he pointed to the entry, and looked at Jack curiously.

" Bracken Fell seems hot on marriages ! " and he laughed. " We had an aged couple here not twelve hours since. Peter Mason was his name—aye—a widower—he said. And as for the lady, she filled the old parlour with the scents she carried about with her."

" Strange," said Jack, darting a look at his wife. Unfortunately for Elliot this newly-married couple were not communicative.

Jack ordered supper and a room, and then took Kitty out across the green under the stars.

" So the prince came, after all ! " said Kitty, as she clung to him.

" And so the princess waited, and grew in beauty and in womanhood, and never gave up hope ! "

" It is very pathetic to me," she said, " about that aged couple. All the village knows that the squire and his lady have lived a cat and dog life."

Jack did not answer. He was thinking of something quite different.

"Kitty, I am glad that entry is there in the old register. The evidence of my mother's honour. Let it stay there—for all time."

"And to-morrow, Jack?"

"To-morrow, and all the to-morrows, in the service of the people, Mistress Jack Wolfson!"

XXXVII

NANCY SEES THE DAWN

National consternation but feebly expresses the indignant horror which spread through the country as the facts concerning the "Massacre of Peterloo" as it was promptly dubbed, became known.

The magistrates, thoroughly alarmed, sent one of their number and "another" to Lord Sidmouth to give an authoritative account of the proceedings. He, receiving them on Tuesday, posted off to interview the Prince Regent, and having put before His Royal Highness the "facts," a letter was instantly sent to the Manchester magistrates congratulating them on what had been done.

No action could be more calculated to stir the moderate minded public, and the magistrates, whose consciences made them fear revenge, made preparations for an alleged invasion of Manchester by infuriated workers, including one thousand pikemen from Oldham.

Fortunately for Manchester, but unfortunately for the magistrates' prestige, no pikes appeared.

In fact, not one single act of revenge was perpetrated on magistrates or yeomanry, even though an inspired special jury refused to accept any claim made in court by individual sufferers against their assailants.

But witnesses were too numerous to be ignored, and the truth gathered its strength.

Happily *The Times* correspondent, though an acknowledged non-sympathiser with Hunt and the Reform movement, was on the hustings, and sent out with frankest honesty a hideous and ghastly account of what he had seen. His opinion was that there was not the slightest apprehension for the safety of the town, and that not a brick-bat was thrown nor a pistol fired as the cavalry rode up. The cavalry were

received as though friends of the crowd, and even when arrested Hunt urged the people to tranquillity.

The editor of the *Liverpool Mercury* was also an eye-witness, and told a story which he used in his evidence at Mr. Hunt's trial later. " In no case whatever," he witnessed, " did I see any attempt to resist, nor any encouragement to resist given by Hunt or any other person, either by word, look or gesture. I saw no sticks lifted against the military. I saw no brick-bats or stones thrown till the close of the dispersion, when I saw one stone thrown."

The strongest point for the organisers of the meeting was that there were many thousands of women and children in the crowd, and that no direct evidence was ever brought forward that the Riot Act had been read.

Meetings of protest were instantly organised all over the country. The Government was alarmed. The City of London Council demanded an inquiry. Sir Francis Burdett, Member for Westminster, did the same, and their move was followed by many others.

At York, because Lord Fitzwilliam supported the calling of a meeting of protest, the Government removed him from his office of High Sheriff. This cowardly method of evading the issue alienated further the moderate opinion, and brought hosts of the middle classes round to the side of the people.

A subscription list was opened for the sufferers, and inquiries showed that ten victims had died, 420 were wounded, of whom about a quarter were women.

It was, however, a foregone conclusion that the prisoners should be committed for trial, and Hunt and his fellows were sent from the New Bailey to Lancaster within a fortnight.

Jack followed, to do what he could for the prisoners, by writing, securing witnesses, and helping in every way possible, but Kitty stayed in Bracken Fell.

For Nancy was failing fast, and the young wife was giving herself up to tender nursing of the old granny, whose keen life was at last burning away the enfeebled frame.

No word had been said to Nancy as to the catastrophe, but with patience Kitty hoped to bring to her mind the fact that the common was coming back to the people.

Life in the village had lulled. Malcolm's funeral was over, and it had been an amazing and moving time for Sir Peter and

Anne as they found themselves the centre, not of wrath, but of sympathy.

They were being forced to the knowledge that fellowship in common suffering with the common people might be of higher worth even than place and power. But so soon as Malcolm was laid to rest the squire and his wife and daughter went abroad, leaving David and Mary in charge of the Manor House.

In parting, Sir Peter drew his sister into his study for a last word.

"I will leave it to you, Mary," he said, as he drew a paper from his desk, "to tell my son that though he refuses so much, he cannot refuse everything. I find that Malcolm has left all his personal property to Jack, with the curious proviso that he shall use it for himself, his wife and his children, in order that they may serve the people as he could never have done."

Mary's eyes filled with tears.

"Oh, Peter!" she exclaimed, "do you think that the will of God will ever get done on earth?"

"Never—if it depends on men like your brother, Mary!" and he kissed her on the cheek.

It was about a fortnight later that all the district was plunged into excitement.

News had come through that, though the accusation of treason had been withdrawn, Hunt and his fellow prisoners had been committed for misdemeanour to the York Assizes. Bail was allowed, and bail had poured in, and Hunt was now making a triumphal progress to Manchester.

Vipond brought the news that Hunt would pass through Bracken Fell somewhere about mid-day, and neither mill nor mine could keep the people at work, and they thronged the roads along which he would pass.

Jack was his forerunner, and received a wild ovation as he cantered into the village on a heavy farm horse.

"He is on the road, lads!" he shouted. "Aye—that's right!" and he nodded towards an excited group of women and girls. "Going to fling flowers and leaves under Old Bob's feet?"

But there was one witness to all the excitement who stood moodily in the "Fur and Feathers."

George, the new Lord Bracken, was filled with an impotent fury at life. It was known that Miss Catherine Mason had

thrown him and his peerage over. Well—there were other girls in the world, he thought sourly. But here were his very mill hands using their dinner hour and wasting good working time by thronging the roads to cheer this mountebank Hunt. Well—cheers brought no business. After all, he owned the mills, the cottages—or those of them not under the Manor House—he could wait.

He drew closer to the window.

Yes, there was the fellow Hunt, bowing and saluting as though he were royalty, and the people yelling, and women weeping, and some wounded folk being lifted through the crowd to kiss his hand. It was monstrous. And what were they shouting about "Good Auld Bob!" as though his very horse were some Pegasus descended from the heavens! Lord Bracken laughed bitterly. And there was that abandoned woman, Kitty, fastening a rose above the horse's eyes. Lord Bracken called a servant, passed some guineas hastily, and strode away through the back garden of the inn.

Hunt was in good spirits, and greeted David and Mary and Kitty eagerly.

"Yes, I am free—but the enemy will get me in the end!" he admitted confidentially. "They must keep up the prestige of the magistrates and the Government, however justice may thereby be wounded. They will now search heaven and hell for witnesses against us. Prison I foresee—the House of Commons—and afterwards—well—Hunt may have played his part!"

But as, a little later, Hunt and the party were rising from dinner, a servant appeared with a message.

"I am sorry to say, sir, that your horse has just dropped down dead in the stall!"

Hunt staggered up. His face was white, his lips compressed.

"Poison!" cried Jack. "I will go—send to the horse doctor—we will examine——"

But Hunt raised his hand, and there was a breathless silence as he controlled himself to speak.

"Alas! Poor Bob! By your leave, gentlemen, I will have no examination. Not a hair of him shall be touched!"

But the news spread instantly through the waiting crowd. Mr. Hunt's favourite horse, his fifteen years' companion, had

been poisoned. Shouts of wrath and groans passed into the inn.

"Go out to them, Jack," said Hunt, whispering a few words.

"See here, lads!" called Jack from the window. "Mr. Hunt refuses any examination of his horse. He may have been poisoned ('He was! He was! Jack!'), or he may have been ridden too hard, and given his last strength to the people's cause. But lads! Old Bob shall have no common grave. We will bury him upright under Master Dolling's tree. I see plenty of you colliers over there who can dig the pit!"

No sooner suggested than eager volunteers rushed off to the task, and when, somewhat later, Hunt and the others walked quietly up to the tree, a vast crowd was waiting.

Reverently the faithful beast had been placed in position, and Hunt stood wrestling with his agitation as the grave was carefully filled in.

"Dust to dust! Alas, poor Bob!" he murmured. "Bob never cursed at Henry Hunt." Then he turned to Jack. "It is no use—I can't speak to them. Thank them all!"

"Mr. Hunt wishes me to thank you, friends," said Jack, stepping forward. "And when he has gone he wishes you to put out of your minds all revengeful thoughts. Let us believe, as I have already told you, that Old Bob has done the task we ought each of us to be ready to do. He has worked for the people and laid down his life for the cause."

"Aye—aye," came in respectful murmurs, even though some doubted.

"But now—some of you are going to drag Mr. Hunt along the road to Manchester. Well—fine luck to you! My wife and I would like to come with you, but in truth, friends, our old granny needs us both. But before we part I wish to tell you that at Peterloo we have won the first round in the fight for liberty, for which, in days to come, men and women will bless us. We have won the round clean—and God grant that every round in the battle for the people may be as clean. But one more word—a wonderful ray of light has flashed into the darkness here—for Bracken Fell and Bishop's End. Our common is coming back to us!" He put up his hand to stop

the astonished acclamation. "I shall soon be rare and busy with the lawyers over it, but though it can never again be as it was, at least every cottage shall have the right to garden, pig and poultry, and for the rest—the revenue will go direct to the people, under trustees—Mr. and Mrs. Ross, Harry Vipond and myself!"

Jack's face was now aflame with gladness, but even he was unprepared for the outbreak of wild applause and emotion.

"The common! The common!" so the words passed incredulously. Hands were gripped, men and women shouted, and wept for sadness and for joy.

"God bless Jack! God bless Jack o' the People!" so they shouted.

"Aye, my friends," said Hunt, stepping forward. "God indeed bless Jack and God bless his wife, and God bless the people!" There was a solemnity in his manner which awed the crowd. He stepped to Old Bob's grave and stood quietly amidst breathless silence. Then he put on his hat and turned away.

"And God bless and keep you, sir," said Jack movedly.

"I am a poor rough tool, and God's carpenter's bench must be rare and empty if He has to pick up Henry Hunt for His work!" he replied, as he rung Jack's hand.

But the people of Bracken Fell could only look one another in the eyes and repeat the magic words:

"The common! The common!"

The evening dragged lingeringly as Jack and Kitty watched beside Nancy's bed. Kitty was about to go for candles, when she paused at sound of the old familiar "Whisht!"

Nancy lunged forward, and Kitty put an arm under her.

"See! The river! Cold—cold—Whisht, little one! Whisht! Nancy has thee safe—safe——" Her staring eyes closed and they waited.

"The Lady of Bracken Fell! She rides—how she rides—the corn stack flames—the common! Take me to the window—the dawn—let poor mad Nancy see the dawn!"

She spoke with a moving and imperious authority. Kitty looked at Jack and nodded.

Jack lifted the frail form in his powerful arms—such a fragment of God's humanity. But the night was dark. A storm was rising, and rain was beginning to fall.

"The dawn! The golden dawn!" she cried.

But Jack and Kitty saw only the night, and heard only the rain.

"Poor mad Nancy!" said Jack tenderly.

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